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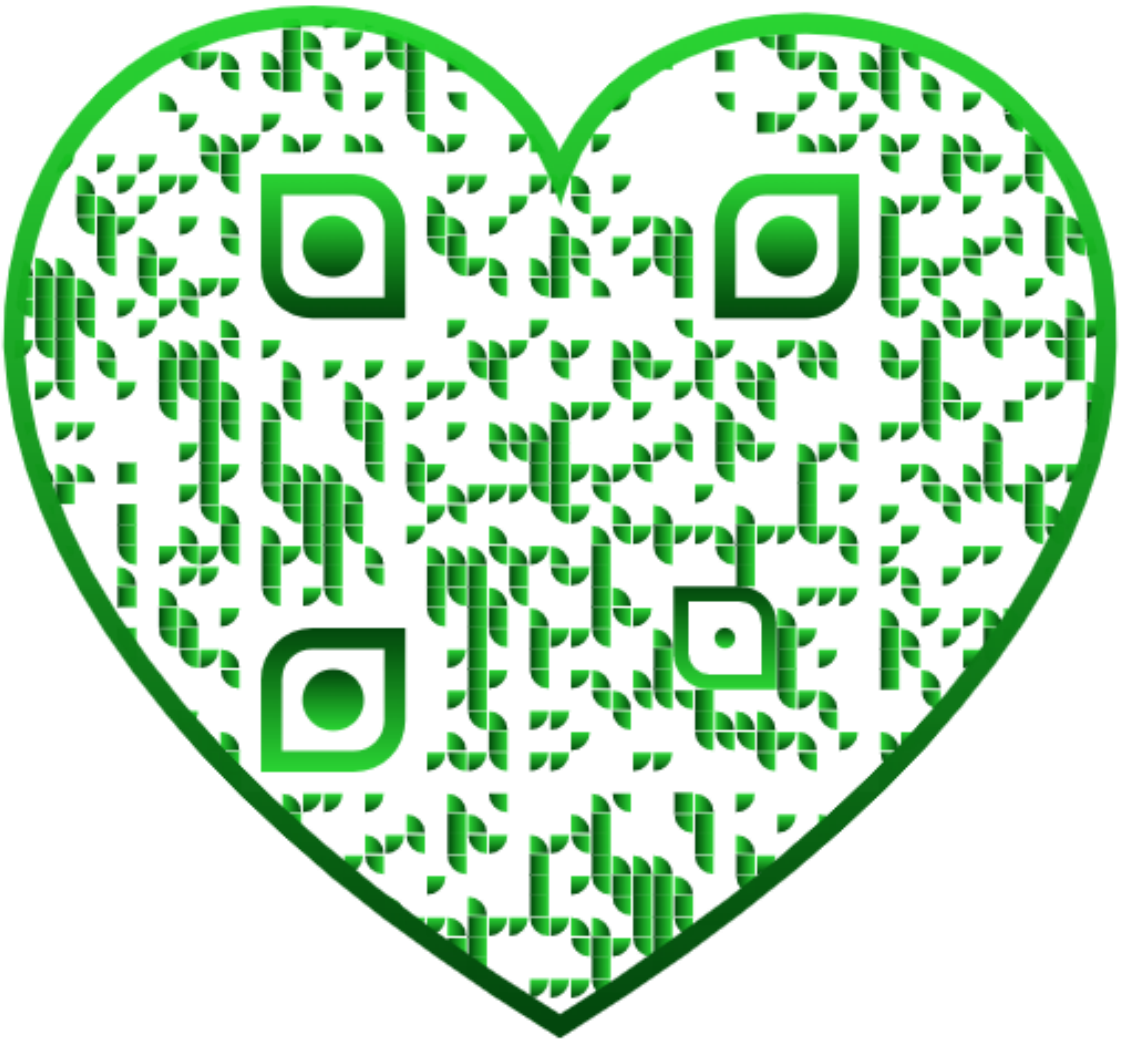

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The times they are a-changin'...

Even the least observant among you will surely have noticed that there's a new face peering out at you from the pages of Guitar & Bass this month. By way of an icebreaker, I have a confession to make, and it's best we get this out of the way first: my name is Chris and I'm a guitar addict. My obsession with these elegant machines of wood and steel began so long ago I can scarcely remember attempting to manufacture my own primitive stringed instruments from elastic bands and empty ice cream tubs until my nagging paid off and I was given a £17, three-quarter sized Argos catalogue classical guitar by my parents at the age of about nine. It didn't matter that the action was so high that I couldn't press the strings down above the fifth fret – a spark was ignited. And it's never gone out.

But enough about me; this is your magazine and you can rest assured that from this month onwards the new-look mag will be packed to the rafters with even more of the things you love. There'll be more new gear reviews, more DIY workshops, more beautiful vintage instruments to lust after, more tuition and more great players. Whether you want to buy a new amp, upgrade your bridge pickup, expand your playing vocabulary or check out a tasty guitar collection, there'll always be something in Guitar & Bass for you. And I'm sure'll you'll agree that the mag looks better than ever.

On a less positive note, a few days before going to press we heard the news that BB King had passed away. Accolades such as 'legendary' and 'iconic' are tossed around like confetti these days, but BB deserved every one that was bestowed upon him. Read our tribute on page eight, and enjoy the rest of the issue...

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HUW PRICE

Huw spent 16 years as a pro audio engineer working with the likes of David Bowie, Primal Scream and NIck Cave. His book *Recording Guitar & Bass* was published in 2002, sparking a career in guitar journalism. He also builds and maintains guitars, amps and FX.

JEFF SLATE

Jeff is a New York-based singer-songwriter and music journalist and a regular contributor to *Esquire*. He has interviewed everyone from Beatles and Pythons to Jimmy Page and Noel Gallagher, is an avid collector of bootlegs and an expert on all things Dylan.

BOB HEWITT

Over the last 30 years, Bob has interviewed and taken pictures of some of the world's greatest musicians, as well as producing two films on the history of the Fender guitar. This month, Bob penned our tribute to BB King, which you can read on page eight.

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BB KING

1925-2015

With input from the likes of Billy Gibbons, Kenny Wayne Shepherd and Andy Fairweather Low, we reflect on the incredible life and legacy of BB King, a true giant of the guitar world

Story and photography **Bob Hewitt**

The King is dead. Long live The King – and the wonderful catalogue of music he leaves behind for us to enjoy. BB King passed away in his sleep on 14 May at his Las Vegas home, aged 89. He was known as 'The King of the Blues' – a man who could make your spine tingle with just one note, rather than a blizzard of distortion and fast fret wizardry. Tributes have flooded in from all over the world, for a man whose music touched so many people.

Kenny Wayne Shepherd, whom King nurtured during his teenage years, told *Guitar & Bass*: "BB is a tremendous loss to the world – not just to me on a personal level. I'm grateful, for the rest of my life, for the time I got to spend with him."

Speaking the day after BB's death, Billy Gibbons said: "It's difficult to fathom a world without BB King. He's been with me literally since the dawn of my musical consciousness."

Born into the blues

Music was born into Riley B King as he entered this world on 16 September, 1925 on the banks of Blue Lake, close to Indianola. He grew up with the influence of guitar-playing preacher Rev. Archie Fair and his bluesman cousin Bukka White, and his playing was further enhanced by the tones of Charlie Christian, Lonnie Johnson, Django Reinhardt – and especially T-Bone Walker. Any showmanship and 'pizzazz' would come from his love of the great Louis Jordan.

At an early age, he escaped a job driving a tractor on the plantation and headed for Memphis to forge a future in the music business. Success came his way, firstly as a DJ with the station WDIA, fronting a show and performing a jingle promoting Pepticon – a type of 'snake oil' tonic, said to cure all ills. He quickly acquired the moniker 'Beale Street Blues Boy' – which was later transposed to the 'BB' we are all familiar with today.

His singing and guitar skills led King into his first band – and he didn't look back. Soon, the 'Beale Street Blues Boy' would be recording, and touring the American circuit in his own custom bus, the bodywork emblazoned with the words 'BB King'. This was the start of something big; something that would last for more than 60 years.

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The hits started to roll... *Three O'Clock Blues, Everyday I Have The Blues, Sweet Little Angel, Rock Me Baby* and the show-stopping *The Thrill Is Gone*. There were collaboration hits, too: *When Love Comes To Town* with U2 and the album title-track *Riding With The King*, performed with long-term friend Eric Clapton.

Following the news of BB's death, Clapton said: "BB King was the originator – the rest of us just copy – listen to *Live At The Regal*... it's all there."

Guitar man

The famous 'Lucille' – a name given to all of King's guitars – came about following a fire at a gig in Twist, Arkansas. A fight ensued and a stove set the building alight. BB fled the building, but realised he'd left his little black Gibson acoustic inside. He later found out the fight was over a girl named Lucille, and all of King's future guitars would bare that name on their headstock.

Other than that little acoustic with a DeArmond pickup attached – and his name painted on the body – BB was one of the first guitar players to use a Fender Esquire. But it's the Gibson ES-355 that has become synonymous with the great man.

Andy Fairweather Low, who played alongside King and Clapton many times, said: "I have played the same [Gibson ES-355] type of guitar as BB King – so have a million other players. But only one person speaks with that 'voice' – only one so clear and definitive. It's not about ability as such – it's about soul... direct from your heart to your fingers."

BB King let his guitar speak like the human voice – rarely playing chords, but rather a tasteful selection of carefully chosen notes, that rang clear and true from his amplifier of choice, the Fender Twin Reverb.

Alan Rogan – guitar tech to the stars – told *Guitar & Bass*: "BB King was wonderful to work with, I will miss him – a real gent."

Alan helped BB in the studio and at his Royal Albert Hall gigs. "BB used my old tweed high-power Fender Twins – he said they were the best amps he'd heard in 35 years."

Of course, it wasn't just BB's unique guitar style that propelled him to stardom – he had a powerful, but melodic and beautiful singing voice. Speaking just hours after King's death, Daryl Hall – another King collaborator – cited BB's 'soulfulness'.

"Ten years ago, I performed a duet with BB, called *Ain't Nobody Home*, and I was totally impressed with his singing at the age of 80. Not only was BB a great bluesman, he was a great soul singer – and he will be very missed."

Uncle B

BB opened his own blues clubs throughout the USA and he was inducted into the Blues Foundation Hall of Fame, as well as the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.

Legendary record producer and guitarist John Porter worked with King for many years – both on sessions and in the studio. He was responsible for the acclaimed *Deuces Wild* and Grammy-winning *Blues On The Bayou* albums. We caught up with John at his Wiltshire home to talk about the sad news.

"I knew him as 'Uncle B'," said Porter. "We played on a lot of sessions together, but importantly, we talked a lot, too... about blues and road stories. BB was a real gentleman in every sense of the word – gracious and kind. My whole life was changed by him."

When asked about The King's music, Porter answered: "Musically, he rewrote the book for electric blues guitar playing – you can't hear music today without his influence."

Getty Images

"We had 89 years of one of the greatest human beings on this planet"

KENNY WAYNE SHEPHERD

Porter also spoke of BB's love of Peter Green, a player who he said "really got me excited".

"You can hear BB's style and influence in today's blues youngsters – especially Kenny Wayne Shepherd," he added.

Kenny spoke to *Guitar & Bass* from California about the passing of his mentor and close friend. "I grew up listening to BB via my dad – his music was the soundtrack of my childhood," he said. "I toured with him when I was 15 years old – and on my 16th birthday he sat me down for a 'man to man' chat and gave me lots of 'fatherly advice'... especially about my responsibility as a musician."

Although KWS can rock out with the best of them, you can hear BB's influence throughout his guitar playing. "His spirit is very much alive in my playing," said Kenny. "He taught me the power of one note – or just a few choice notes, delivered at the right time... say more with so much less."

Mark Flanagan, guitarist in Jools Holland's Rhythm & Blues Orchestra, also recalls learning a valuable lesson while playing with The King: "I don't remember him looking once at his amplifier. It was probably a Twin from John Henry's... He just plugged in, tweaked the old ES-355 – he used a surprisingly high action, by the way – and it sounded like him!

"A lesson for those gear-heads out there: sound isn't just about equipment, it comes from your hands, your head and your heart, and BB had a bigger heart than most. What a player. What a man. What a legacy. Thank you Mr King."

King's influence is felt from established players such as Shepherd and Flanagan, to the upcoming young stars of the future. Max Jenks-Gilbert is a 19-year-old British guitarist based in South Carolina – sitting in with Ezra Brown and his band. To hear him laying down his BB chops on his Epiphone Casino is like listening to 'The Master' at The Regal.

"BB King was the main reason I started playing the blues," said Max. "He's possibly the biggest influence on my guitar playing today – showing how three simple notes can say more than anything else.

"BB King will forever remain 'simplicity for the soul' – and his music will continue to inspire generations to come."

To know him was to love him

This writer was fortunate and privileged to work with BB and his [then] manager Sid Seidenberg, photographing his British tours during the 1980s. There was one particular image that was a favourite of Sid's – and BB's [see page 8].

Waiting stage-side at a Manchester theatre while his band played his intro music, BB was telling me how much he liked that particular photo. He turned to me and said: "You play guitar don't you son? I'd like to give you a 'Lucille' of your own."

I was so shocked, I almost fell over – "Yes, I do Mr King, thank you so much," I stuttered. I couldn't believe the 'King of the Blues' was going to gift me one of his Gibson guitars! BB turned around, took off the little gold 355-shaped lapel pin he was wearing and stuck it onto my jacket! "There you go – now you've got a 'Lucille' too." That was 30 years ago, and I still have that treasured pin to this day.

BB King's music and humility touched so many people, young and old. Some will say "The Thrill is Gone" now BB is no longer with us, but I disagree, I think 'The Thrill' will be around for many years to come.

I'll leave the final words to King's favourite protégé, Kenny Wayne Shepherd: "We had 89 years of one of the greatest human beings on this planet – he gave us so much incredible music. We should appreciate and celebrate his life." Amen to that.

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THE END OF AN ERA?

Frankfurt Musikmesse 2015 show report

Story and photography **Chris Vinnicombe**

The musical instrument industry's annual shindig in Frankfurt took place in the typically balmy spring conditions that always seem to catch us Brits off guard, but the show itself – traditionally more businesslike, more shirt and tie than the ripped jeans and t-shirt of NAMM – could be the last Musikmesse as we know it. 2016 will bring a significant shift in emphasis as the event becomes fully public for the first time and is relocated to halls 8, 9 and 11 in the western section of the labyrinthine Frankfurt Fair And Exhibition Centre, making way for an expanded Prolight + Sound event technology presence.

More and more manufacturers seem to be of the mindset that they no longer need a trade show to launch a new product, but with next year's event allowing prospective guitar buyers to get their hands on the gear, it may again be a party at which all of the major brands feel they have to be seen. Although the likes of Fender and PRS were conspicuous by their absence this year, there was still plenty of new gear at Musikmesse 2015 to get excited about. Read on for our highlights... >

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ELECTRIC GUITARS AND BASSES

Following their appearance in prototype form at NAMM, Musikmesse again saw **Gibson Custom** showcasing its True Historic Les Pauls 1. Not only are the plastics and pickup covers much closer to those used from 1956-60, but instruments throughout the range will also feature thinner, hand-sanded lacquer, softer edge profiles, hand-filed rolled fingerboard binding, new carving processes and much more. UK street pricing looks set to range from £4,999 to £6,259 for Gibson's most vintage-accurate range of LP reissues to date.

Elsewhere on the Gibson Custom stand, there were yet more Les Paul reducia in the shape of the 1968 and 1974 Les Paul Custom Historic Reissues (£TBA). The '68 2 comes loaded with '68 Custom Double Black AL2 Braided Wire pickups and features a two-piece maple top, one-piece mahogany back and a one-piece mahogany neck with a long tenon, while the '74 3, available in Classic Vintage White, Wine Red and Ebony, is equipped with Super '74 humbuckers, a three-piece maple top, three-ply 'sandwich' back and three-piece mahogany neck – again with a long tenon.

If that wasn't enough, the latest addition to the Collector's Choice series is a run of replicas of a 1960 Les Paul (serial number 0-0162), known as 'Blackburst' 4 (£5,499) on account of the original owner ordering a black Standard as he couldn't afford a Les Paul Custom. The prototype was played by Lenny Kravitz at the recent Super Bowl half-time performance and is a very cool looking instrument indeed with the slavish attention to detail we've come to expect from the Collector's Choice series, including an ebony finish that's worn at the edges, revealing glimpses of the cherry beneath.

Fans of bling were also well catered for by the Les Paul Custom Figured (£4,499) in Centipede Burst 5 and Rattler Burst. Also in attendance, with two security guards in tow, was the $2 million Gibson Eden Of Coronet 6, currently holding the status of the world's most valuable guitar – as certified by Guinness World Records.

Significantly more affordable from the Gibson stable, and launched at Musikmesse by the man himself, was the **Epiphone** Limited Edition Tony Iommi Signature SG Custom 7 (£TBA). The instrument's mahogany neck has a 1960s Slim Taper D profile, with an ebony fingerboard sporting Iommi's unmistakeable pearloid cross inlays. Pickups are Gibson USA Tony Iommi Signature humbuckers and production will be limited to 2,000 guitars, packaged with a hand-signed certificate of authenticity amongst other case candy.

Elsewhere, the **Schecter** Custom Shop's USA Production PT Custom in Ace Burst 8 (£2,049) turned more than a few heads with its sumptuous bookmatched flametop. Fans of retro twang, meanwhile, were well catered for over on the TV Jones stand; our pick was the achingly cool Sherwood Green **RebelRelic** Roadster Jr 9 (€2,290) with its solitary T-Armond single-coil pickup, wrapover bridge and satisfyingly substantial U-shaped neck.

Flying the British flag was **Orange**, with new prototypes of the company's forthcoming electric guitar and bass models 10 showcasing further aesthetic refinements since the versions we saw at NAMM. Expect more news soon on these affordable designs – the bass in particular is a real growler! Also at the show was a very cool, but sadly one-off, **Manson Guitar Works** MA Special 11 in Orange livery, classic pic decals and all.

Finally, anyone in the market for an affordable 12-string semi with which to indulge those Beatles/Byrds fantasies would be frankly insane not to check out the new **Danelectro** DC59TSB-12 12 (£399), which combines retro Dano '59 stylings with a fully-adjustable bridge to help keep everything nicely in tune. >

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AMPS, EFFECTS AND ACCESSORIES

Messe's biggest story when it came to amps was the first public showing of the new **Marshall** Astoria Series. 1 Quite the lookers in colour-coded vinyl, all three incarnations are available in head or 1x12 combo form. Built at the company's Bletchley HQ, common features are a 30-watt KT66 power stage, GZ34 rectification, power reduction and a combination of hand-wired turret board and PCB internals.

The single-channel green and cream AST1 Astoria Classic (£1,799 for the head, £2,099 for the combo) is all about loud, clear valve tone and should appeal to those looking for a boutique pedal platform. The red and cream AST2 Custom (£1,899 and £2,199) adds a foot-switchable valve-driven effects loop and gain boost and tone-shaping pull switches. The blue and cream AST3 Dual (£1,999 and £2,299) has the extra features of the Custom, plus twin channels and higher gain on tap. Matching 1x12 cabinets (£519) come loaded with Celestion Creamback speakers.

The resurrected **Supro** line was bolstered by the addition of the spring reverb and power tube tremolo-loaded 1650RT Royal Reverb (£1,249), 1648RT Saturn Reverb (£1,149) and 1622RT Tremo-Verb (£1,099). The 1622RT 2 looks particularly sweet with its compact, gig-friendly 25-watt 1x10 configuration.

Away from the noise of the show floor, we were serenaded in the sunshine by a demo of the new **Roland** Blues Cube Tour 100-watt head (£999) and 4x10 cabinet, along with the 85-watt Artist 212 combo (£869) 3. Both models feature clean and crunch channels that can be blended with the Dual Tone mode, as well as reverb; the combo adds tremolo.

We also witnessed the first public sighting of the **Vox** AC10C1 4 (£430), which packs a Top Boost circuit with master volume, reverb and a 10-inch Celestion VX10 into a highly portable and affordable package.

Days before the company's sale to pro audio kingpin MUSIC Group was announced, **TC Electronic** debuted the Ditto Stereo Looper 5 (£95). Basic Ditto features – one loop level knob, single footswitch functionality, five minutes of looping time and unlimited overdubs – are unchanged, but now you get stereo inputs and outputs, optional 9V battery operation, import and export of pre-recorded loops over USB and more.

After the launch of the Dunlop Cry Baby Mini at NAMM, other brands have begun to strike back in the micro wah war. The space-saving, dual-mode, analogue **Boss** PW-3 6 (£95) features adjustable tension and easily-visible status LEDs on both sides of the unit.

Also from Roland, the Boss SY-300 7 (£499) promises "a new approach to guitar synthesis" without the need for a GK pickup or 13-pin cable. Via a standard guitar cable, the SY-300 puts a potent synthesis engine at your fingertips with virtually no latency.

As well as showing off cool new headphones 8 and its tangle-free Twister Cable 9 (both £TBC), **Orange** also announced its first stompbox since the mid-70s. The Bax Bangeetar 10 (£279) is described as "Ade in a box", thanks to OMEC technical director Adrian Emsley's expert input into the powerful, tone-sculpting pre-EQ. With Baxandall EQ, full parametric mid controls, an internal charge pump to preserve clarity and headroom, a speaker emulated output and black or white livery, this is a serious piece of kit. The third generation of Rockerverb amps were present, but we'd already got our mitts on the 100-watter. Check out Huw Price's review on page 64.

Also noteworthy were the noisenik-friendly Obscura Altered Delay 11 from **DigiTech** (£129); bass guru **EBS**'s guitar effects debut via the Red Label Series DynaVerb GE 12, Red Twister GE chorus 13 and MultiComp GE 14 (£TBC); and **Elixir**'s market research-driven new Nanoweb Nickel Plated Steel and Stainless Steel bass strings 15. 4,000 bassists can't be wrong... >

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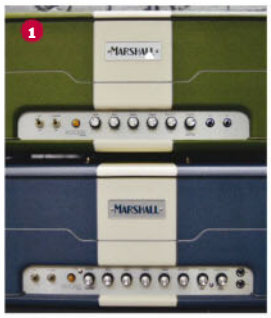

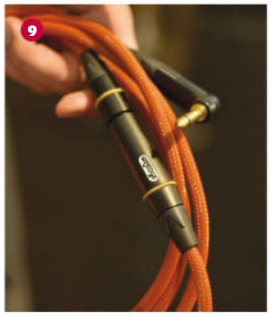

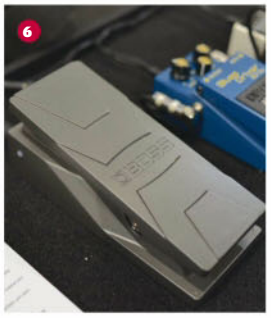

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ACOUSTIC GUITARS

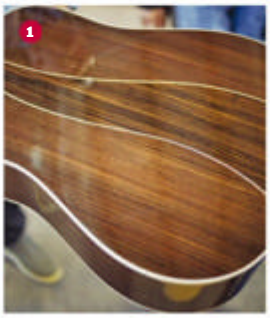
Martin Guitar brought a little corner of Nazareth, Pennsylvania to Musikmesse with an array of new models. The D-35E 50th Anniversary Limited Edition 1 (£4,099) celebrates half a century of the iconic D-35, with a European spruce top treated using Martin's Vintage Tone System torrefaction process, plus an organic East Indian rosewood wedge and headplate. A black ebony 'board and bridge and Fishman's Aura VT system complete the picture.

The company also showed off its LE-HMSD 2015 dreadnought 2 (£4,099), commemorating the centenary of HMS Dreadnought sinking a SM U-29 submarine in the First World War. They mentioned it, but we think they got away with it. More affordable Martins included the Ed Sheeran X Signature Edition 3 (£579), the royalties from which the singer will donate to charity, the non-cutaway X Series 00-shape 14-fret 00X1AE 4 and Grand Performance 14-fret GPX1AE 5 (both £559 with Fishman Sonitone electronics), and the Road Series GPCRSGT Grand Performance, 14-fret cutaway 6 (£959 with Fishman Sonitone).

Yamaha's SLG200S steel-string and SLG200N nylon-string Silent Guitar models 7 (both £514) also debuted, featuring SRT pickup and preamp systems, improved FX, and a redesigned rosewood and maple frame.

We were also impressed by **Freshman**'s compact 12-string addition to its Maple Ridge Series – the FA1FNS12 8. With a solid Sitka spruce top, it looks outstandingly good value at £249.

CONTACTS **Martin** 0844 326 2000 **www.martinguitar.com** • **Yamaha** 0844 811 1116 **uk.yamaha.com** • **Freshman** 01355 228028 **www.freshmanguitars.net**



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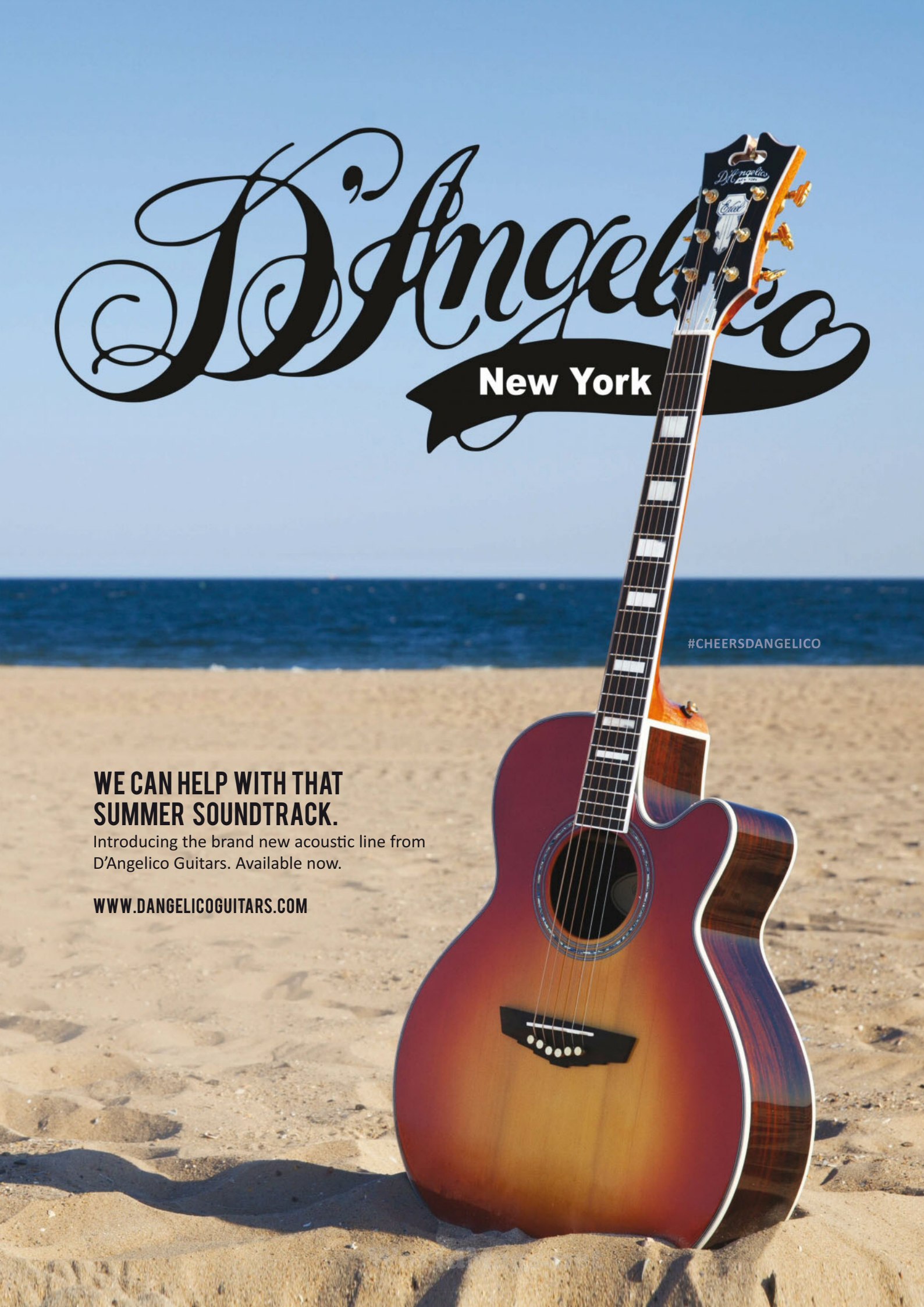
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KIT LIST

James While

- **PEDALS (in order)** Pete Cornish OC-1 compressor, P-1 fuzz, G-2/SS-3 Duplex overdrive/distortion, CC-1 overdrive/EQ, TC Electronic SCF Stereo Chorus Flanger, Neo Mini Vent rotary speaker simulator, Free The Tone FT-1Y Flight Time digital delay, Pete Cornish ABC amp switcher, Sonic Research ST-200 Turbo Tuner (via a fixed tuner out on the G-2)
- **PATCH CABLES** Pete Cornish Belden 8412
- **POWER SUPPLY** Olson mains conditioner and Voodoo Labs Pedal Power 4x4
- **'BOARD TYPE** Swan flight base with homemade tier

HEAR IT HERE...

www.soundcloud.com/gilmourhead

READER BOARDS

Welcome to the first in a new series in which we take a look at the wild and wonderful pedals that you trample underfoot. Setting the bar rather high, here's **JAMES WHILE'S** Cornish tone mine...

We're getting a David Gilmour vibe. Did he inspire this setup?

"I'd be lying if I said that he isn't a huge inspiration. But my objective became to create the best 'board I could, tonally, with the fewest pedals covering the most possible ground."

Tell us a little about the journey...

"My last full-time gig was in a house band for motorsports events. I used a Tweed Twin reissue with a Carl Martin Quattro, a flanger and a RAT. It was mainly classic rock – The Eagles, Skynyrd, etc. Afterwards, I decided to focus on Floyd-y stuff. Vintage pedals can be very noisy; I tried using big switchers, but it all became too complex and I hated my tone! I then got my first Cornish pedal – the G-2/SS-3 Duplex – and suddenly I realised the whole deal with the double buffer system. My tone went through the roof; I could hear harmonics and mids at last.

"Around this time, Pete suggested Hiwatts, and they are the ultimate pedal platform. I sold the Twin when I got two incredible Lazy J 20s. I love tweed amps. I've never had an amp with an effects loop or twin channels. Everything is about tone into the front end of a clean-ish amp. I have a '74 Hiwatt DR103 head with a mid-70s Fane Pulsonic-loaded cab; there's a huge dichotomy between the chime of the Hiwatt versus the grit of the Lazy Js. In stereo, it's superb.

"Pete was amazing; he wouldn't push his own product, he'd push his wisdom, and there's a big difference. He instilled that simple is best, and that properly-buffered systems retain more tone than true bypass.

"I rarely, if ever, use one drive pedal on its own. Everything is stacked, and it's here that Cornish products become very intuitive. The CC-1 has a great EQ; it's set to a very mild mid-hump and it's always on when either of the fuzzes are on. One constant has been the wonderful TC SCF. I love its shimmering *The Wall* and Andy Summers tones."

Is your 'board complete, or is there something else you'd like to add?

"I have three more Cornish boxes incoming! People already liken my 'board to an Eastern Bloc cityscape from the 80s, so I'm looking forward to going even greyer!"

What guitars do you plug into all of this?

"As much as I try to play other instruments, my tastes are pretty traditional. My main guitar is a Fender '56 Mary Kay Relic, Vince Cunetto finished but made by Fender's great master builder, JW Black, especially for me in 1996. Others include a VOS R9, a wonderful Nash '62 S-type, a 1960 Telecaster and my Gibson CS-356 with a Bigsby – saved up for Neil Young moments!"

What lessons have you learned along the way?

"Build a 'board that enhances *your* playing, not someone else's. Spend as much as you can afford to on leads and power supplies as they make a huge difference."

Guitar & Bass SHOW US YOUR BOARD

To be in with a chance of seeing your pedalboard in the mag, either post a picture on our Facebook page via this link **http://bit.ly/showusyourpedalboard** or email **guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com**

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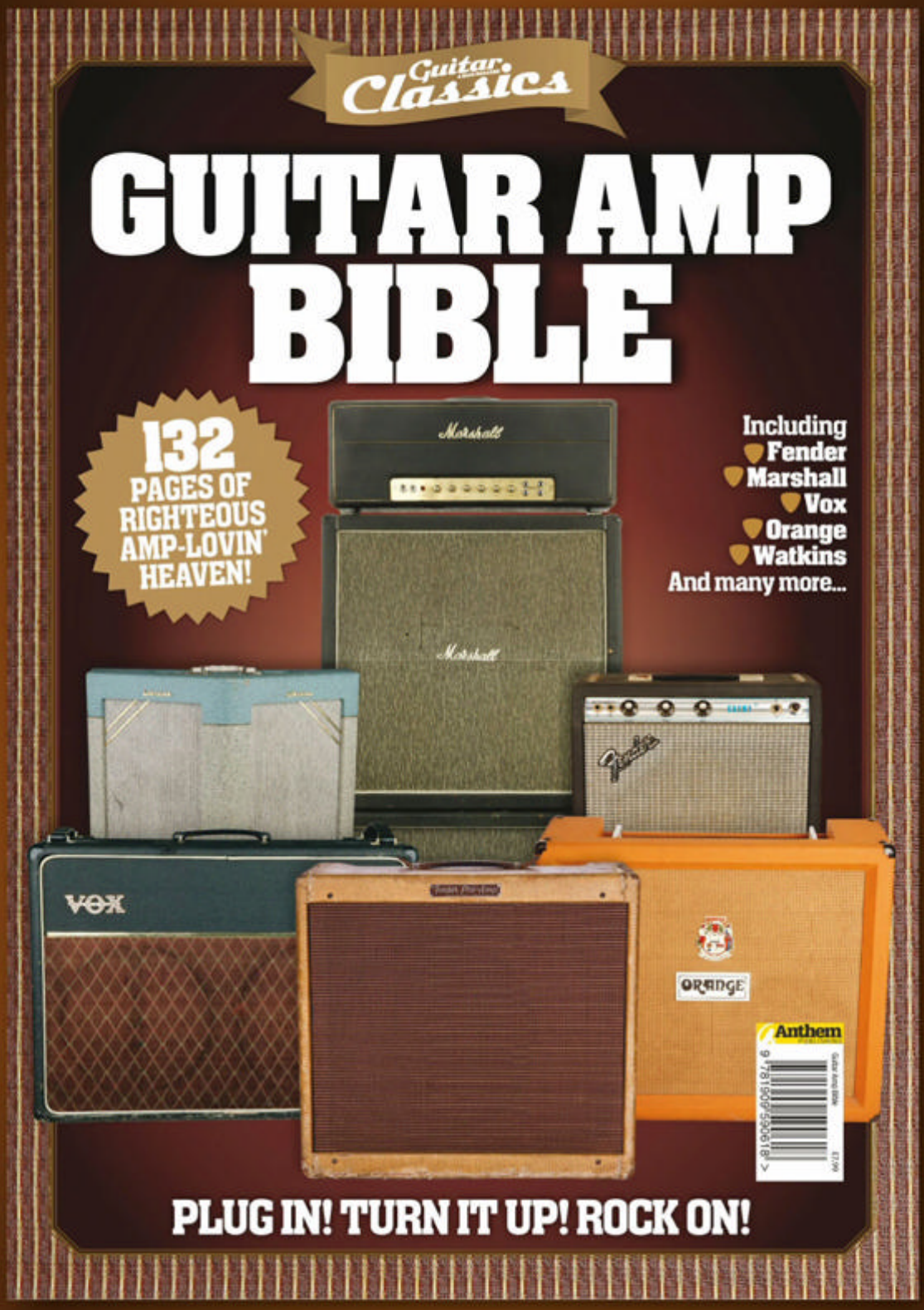

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SOUNDTRACK OF MY LIFE

Luther Dickinson

The North Mississippi Allstars guitarist's record collection is a journey through rock 'n' roll history

Luther Dickinson and his brother Cody were born into the fellowship of Memphis rock 'n' roll. Their father, James, was a famed producer and piano player, whose band the Dixie Flyers backed the likes of Aretha Franklin, Albert Collins and The Tempters. 'Jim' became a producer, working with Big Star and Screamin' Jay Hawkins and making 12 albums with Ry Cooder. Luther – who has also played with The Black Crowes – is joined in North Mississippi Allstars by his brother Cody and bassist Chris Chew. In their latest project, The Word, the trio are augmented by pedal steel virtuoso Robert Randolph and keys man John Medeski. Luther describes them as "the world's only psychedelic instrumental gospel rock 'n' roll band", and the band's second album, *Soul Food*, is a feast of righteous grooves and blissed-out abandon.

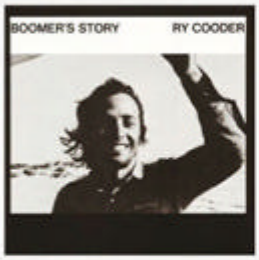
James Luther Dickinson
BEALE STREET SATURDAY NIGHT

"*BSSN* is compiled and produced by my father, featuring Memphis musicians of the 70s, like Furry Lewis, who was like the godfather of the Memphis bohemia. I remember this being recorded as a child. It also represents memories of family and friends playing music and my mom tuning my first guitar to an open chord while she and dad showed me how to strum."

Jimi Hendrix
THE JIMI HENDRIX CONCERTS

"My dad turned me on to this at a very young age and it remains a favourite. These are high-quality analogue recordings and it sounds beautiful. No one will ever touch Hendrix. I yield not to the temptation of emulating Jimi. His effortless use of feedback makes me think of demons trying to break through the hatch of hell. They are at his beck and call."

Ry Cooder
BOOMER'S STORY



"My father played piano on and co-produced this folk-rock classic. Cooder, like Robert Johnson and Bob Dylan, uses the American folk oral tradition, taking traditional lyrics and melodies but rearranging the music to suit his guitar style. Because of this record, I assumed that open turnings, slide guitar and fingerpicking were the normal way to play."

Black Flag
SIX PACK (SEVEN-INCH SINGLE)

"At the age of 12, this sounded like music from my planet. I asked my dad to help me figure out how to play it. It was 'What is this shit? This doesn't make any sense!' Amazing. I found my own rock 'n' roll that alienated my rock 'n' roll father. We saw them perform, after which he said, 'Oh, it's Ornette Coleman meets Captain Beefheart.' Whatever Dad!"

Allman Brothers
LIVE AT FILLMORE EAST

"My Dad had a DAT tape of the remastering of the 1991 release of this. That tape and the psychedelic drugs me and my friends were taking shaped my life. We also discovered *Electric Ladyland* at this crucial juncture. This period almost blew my mind. My brain reconfigured to guitar and the logic of melody. I had found the electric church of rock 'n' roll."

Mississippi John Hurt
LAST SESSIONS

"*Let The Mermaids Flirt With Me* was the first John Hurt song I heard and fell in love with. Like Jimi Hendrix, he is totally unique. I love his melodic syncopated guitar style and playful repertoire. Studying Hurt and trying to play his style brought the epiphany of alternate bass thumb picking, opened up my world and changed my life."

Various artists
SACRED STEEL

"This was the first *Sacred Steel* album on Arhoolie Records and it changed my life. It altered my reality. The second *Sacred Steel* record led me to make a friend in Robert Randolph, who taught me the different styles of slide and rhythm guitar from his church. Together, we play in The world's only psychedelic instrumental gospel rock 'n' roll band."

Jon Spencer Blues Explosion
EXTRA WIDTH

"Dad's band Mud Boy And The Neutrons were part of a progression of garage blues punk that stretched from Alex Chilton to JSBX and The White Stripes. *Extra Width* was the zeitgeist punk blues record for me. We became friends as they rolled into Memphis, and they let us sleep on their floor when we came to NYC. Judah Bauer hired us for our first tour."

Otha Turner
EVERYBODY HOLLERIN' GOAT

"Otha was a first-generation blues musician who blew melodies out of a handmade bamboo fife, accompanied by marching snare and bass drums – Mississippi picnic music. I produced his debut album, recorded outside at his farm, bringing Otha's music and family band to the world. *Rolling Stone* placed *'Goat* in the top 10 blues records of the 90s."

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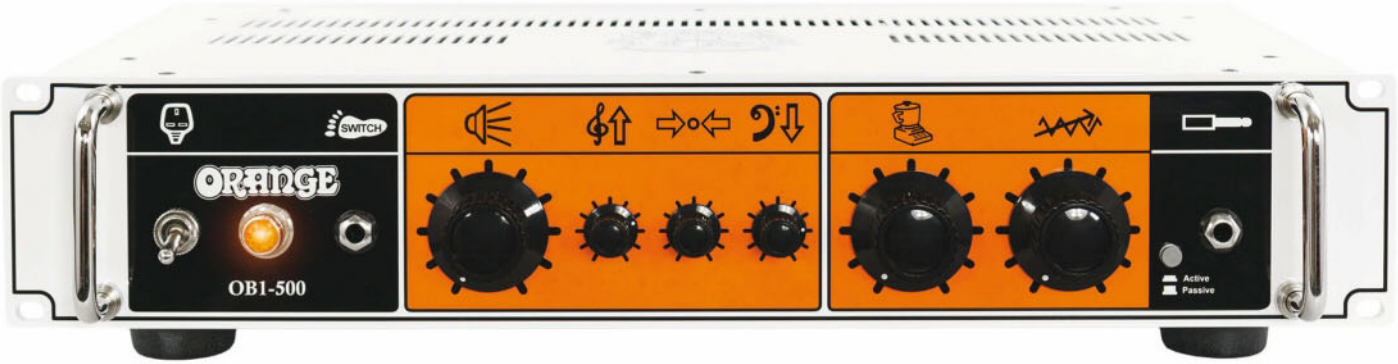

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"It's quite mad that there are people all around the world playing it"

How did the finest American television series of the year end up with a guitar-driven theme tune written and recorded by an indie rock band from London? We find out...

Story **Chris Vinnicombe** | Photography **Eleanor Jane**

Breaking Bad spin-off *Better Call Saul* has been one of the international television hits of 2015. The darkly comic drama series sees Bob Odenkirk portray small-time lawyer Jimmy McGill six years before chief *Breaking Bad* protagonist and aspiring methamphetamine baron Walter White knocks at his door, but it's the 13 or so seconds of music that cuts off sharply at the beginning of every episode of the much-acclaimed '*Saul* that concerns us here.

With a garage-y twang straight out of the late 1960s and no shortage of Bigsby shimmer, it's perhaps surprising that one of *Better Call Saul*'s producers didn't find the theme for the series on a dusty vintage 45 in a West Coast record shop. In fact, London-based trio Little Barrie were the guilty parties. As we sit down in the band's soon-to-be-vacated studio in the Chocolate Factory building in Wood Green, singer-guitarist Barrie Cadogan takes up the narrative...

"Thomas Golubic got in touch with us, he was the music supervisor for the series," Barrie explains. "He's based in LA and he's a fan of the band. Although we'd been there a couple of times doing small gigs, it was quite a surprise to find that someone out there had all our records and was into us. He really wanted us to do something for the show. There were other people pitching for it as well and by the time he'd got in touch with us the show had been recorded and edited and everything. >

GEAR *Little Barrie*

- **BARRIE CADOGAN** 1963 Gibson ES-345, 1962 Gibson ES-330, Philippe Dubreuille custom offset electrics, JPF Regent 25 amplifier, blonde Fender Bassman
- **LEWIS WHARTON** Sunburst vintage Fender Precision bass with a late 1950s neck and a 1960s body

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Little Barrie (L-R): Virgil Howe, Barrie Cadogan and Lewis Wharton

Barrie's ES-345 was originally a sunburst

Barrie added the Bigsby himself, but it's a vintage unit

The deadline was quite tight, so I spoke to him on Skype and he gave us a bit of a rundown on the sort of thing they wanted.

"He was very specific about the fact they wanted to cut something really crudely after about 15 seconds and then go to another scene, and that's gonna happen at the start of each episode. I probably had three days to get him something, four days max. It was interesting because I've not done anything like this before. I spent two days writing; they wanted us to give them maybe about 17 options, short themes. They liked the song we did on our second album, called *Why Don't You Do It*. They wanted something in that vein.

"We were given a brief where they wanted something like that but more melancholy or wistful. That's the kind of stuff you're working with, you just get descriptions. You are hoping that your interpretation of that is the same as theirs. They gave us a bit of a rundown about Saul's character and I did some research as well because I hadn't seen *Breaking Bad* – I had to admit that I hadn't, as I thought I was going to get rumbled at some point. I still haven't seen it!"

Garage rock

"I tried to get a bit of a feel for it and just buckled down with GarageBand, trying to thrash out things and record as much as I could," Barrie continues. "If I'm just doing stuff on my own, I prefer to use a Tascam Porta 07 four-track cassette recorder because it sounds better, but just for treating it like a sketchbook and doing stuff really quickly, GarageBand's alright, you know? It might not always sound great because I don't have a proper setup. All the guitars were just DI'd, so they sounded pretty shitty really on the original demos, but it was enough just to get the ideas down. I brought the laptop up here and we just listened through them on the PA and played through each one. In a four-hour period, we managed to record them all and mix them, and then we sent them off that night. A lot of them were a similar tempo 'cause they wanted that feel, y'know? The BPM was similar. And that's how we did it. We did 17, sent them off, and they were like, 'they're great, can you do some more?' So we did another 12, or something like that. In the end, they chose number seven from the first lot. So it's down as 'Saul Demo #7'."

> "I hadn't seen *Breaking Bad* – I had to admit that, as I thought I was going to get rumbled"
>
> BARRIE CADOGAN

When it came to laying down the guitar parts, Barrie turned to his black 1963 Gibson ES-345 that's also seen plenty of action in his other role as guitarist in Primal Scream, with whom he's performed since 2006. "First, I wanted to use my old ES-330, but it's a little bit noisy. The ES-345 isn't as noisy and it's kind of similar, so I just went for that one. I always wanted a black Gibson. I was out with a friend and we said, 'let's go and have a look in Chandler's.' We were having a conversation about how we both had too many guitars and shouldn't buy any more, and I walked in and saw this and I was like, 'oh fuck! I always wanted a black Gibson.'

"Apparently, the guy who owned it before had it for about 30 years. The black refinish has worn away off the back of the neck and you can see the sunburst on the corner of the body, but it meant that the guitar was affordable. It's a '63, so it's transitional, but the bridge pickup is a PAF."

AMP DILEMMA? *Talk to Frank*

Barrie's amp of choice for the 'Saul sessions was a JPF Regent 25 combo, custom built for him by JPF mainman Dr Frank Cooke. "It came about from an idle chat with Barrie in Angel Music," explains Cooke. "He was looking for an amp with KT66 power valves, to capture the sound of mid '60s Marshalls. At the time we had two amps that are variations on the same topology, but tweaked to either use 6V6s (15W), or EL34s (30W), so we went about optimising our design to take KT66s, which we called the Regent 25. These days with better PAs, guitarists generally don't need the sheer volume of the old 50 and 100-watt heads, so 25-watts is a good compromise between having enough headroom for a live clean sound, but still able to get some power amp distortion without blowing the windows out." www.jpfamps.com

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Barrie "just cranked up the treble" on his custom-built JPF Regent 25 combo and plugged the guitar straight in, sans effects. It was a fortuitous decision, as drummer/engineer Virgil Howe – son of Yes guitarist Steve – recalls: "It was lucky we didn't put reverb on. We used a Lexicon plugin, it's really good. Then they asked for less reverb on the guitar, so it was a good thing we'd recorded it dry and were able to give them a version with less reverb, otherwise we'd have had to re-record it. It was really lucky."

The guitar sound was captured by a Sennheiser MD421-II microphone that Virgil likes because he can "get a lot more bass out of it," and although he acknowledges that their studio approach wasn't exactly scientific, the band have learned a thing or two about getting great guitar sounds: "We just stuck the mic up against the grille, there were no measurements going on," Virgil reveals. "No ambient mics, it was just straight in. At the time, we were just demoing, so we weren't paying that much mind to it, but I suppose over the years we've found it's important to record things as well as possible at all stages. If you record it well enough, there's going to be a use for it down the line somewhere.

"It's nice, it's kind of an epitaph for this place – recording something that's been used on something that's gone global. It's a nice way to wave goodbye to the eight or nine years that we've been here. I was here before I joined Little Barrie, so it's been a long time. Barrie's always said that the guitars sound good in here, there's something about it. It's a bit dead for drums, but we've found our way around that..."

Barrie's Gibson ES-345 is a live favourite with Primal Scream

Room for manoeuvre

"It's really good for guitars," Barrie agrees. "You just get a lot of weight out of the guitar, without being muddy.

"We've found ways to create more of a room sound, sometimes by using reverbs to treat the master mix rather than the individual parts to create the illusion that you're all in the same space. That's what we're trying to do sometimes; trying to get as much performance as we can into the recording and not have things sounding too separate or too fractured."

When it came to recording bassist Lewis Wharton's parts, the band again leaned on Barrie's JPF amplifier. "Everything was the same," Barrie remembers. "I might not even have changed the setting on the amp, we just left it."

Recording bass through electric guitar amps is, of course, nothing new. However, it's a studio trick that is often overlooked these days in favour of the massive bottom-end offered by modern bass rigs, which is something that Barrie laments: "Classic bass players from the past, like Carol Kaye, used to play through Fender Concert amps with 10-inch speakers. >

FREEHAND JAZZ

Also on hand at the studio was Barrie's back-up Philippe Dubreuille electric. "I wanted something like a Jazzmaster but a thicker sound with P90s," he explains. "I wanted the Bigsby and the Gibson bridge so it was more robust. I based it loosely on that custom guitar that John Squire had in The Stone Roses' *One Love* video. I liked the way it looked but the body was really big, like a jazz bass, so I took that idea and scaled it down. I drew around a Jazzmaster and kept tweaking it freehand until I got the right shape. The white one is the main one, this is the spare." **www.dubreuille-guitar.com**

The inspiration for Barrie's custom offset came from John Squire

The original 'ashtray' bridge cover left its mark on the body

This bass, strung with flatwounds, was used on the 'Saul theme

Basses don't come much more road worn than Lewis Wharton's P-Bass

12s are great for bass, too. A friend of ours from Nottingham plays that plectrum-style with flatwound strings, and he uses a Fender Twin a lot for recording.

"We've also used slapback echo on bass. There's a lot of extra frequencies in modern recordings, which for some styles of music seems quite unnecessary.

"For dance music and stuff, you want all that super-low bass, it's part of it, and people want to hear that and feel that when they're in a club; but it's like sometimes when we are on tour, you get to a gig and they've got all these sub speakers under the stage, and if you are a guitar band you don't need all that super-low frequency. We've found that with mixing as well; taking a lot of the super-low frequencies out of kick drums, guitars and bass guitars, because they're kind of irrelevant for the sort of music that we're doing."

Lo-fi fans

It's clear that Little Barrie are a band who aren't afraid to use lo-fidelity equipment in pursuit of a sound that excites them. Given Barrie's earlier comments about his four-track sounding better than GarageBand and the fact that the band routinely use a Tascam Porta 02 that was a £40 eBay score as a preamp on one of the mics when recording drums, we delve further into his love of tape.

"Cassette's got a sound," Barrie insists. "It's different to one- or two-inch analogue multitrack tape, it's got a thing of its own. I really love the cassette sound. It's the old Keith Richards thing, the old Phillips cassette recorder on *Street Fighting Man*. When you haven't got the luxury of lots of equipment, you try to find ways to create sounds that are more interesting.

> "I love the cassette sound. It's the old Keith Richards thing, the old Phillips cassette recorder"
>
> BARRIE CADOGAN

"We've got a little amp that's covered in paint, a little transistor thing; it's great with fuzzboxes. It's a Peavey amp that someone's used as a painting stool while they were decorating. But with fuzzboxes it's really dry, like a buzzsaw. We've even done bass through it. You can end up with absolute paralysis in the studio – you can EQ your guitar in an infinite number of ways. But if you think, 'all we've got is this', you start to work within that and you start to think, 'well how much can we get out of this?' Rather than, 'let's try plugin number 72', you know?"

So how does it feel for the band, knowing that the recording they made within limitations in a small North London studio is now, thanks to the limitless viral potential of the internet, being appreciated worldwide? "It's mad seeing all the little clips of people playing it on YouTube," Barrie smiles.

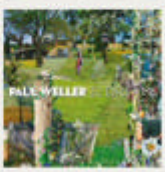
"There's even a big guy with a shaved head on the ukulele. It's quite mad thinking there are people all around the world playing it. We've had that with some of our other songs as well. There's lots of people playing *Surf Hell* because it was on *Rocksmith*, the computer game.

"There was a guy from Minnesota with a cigarette in his mouth, and a tiny Japanese girl playing it on bass – the bass looked massive. I had a go on it on *Rocksmith* and I got a really low score because apparently I wasn't playing it right!"

LISTEN UP

LITTLE BARRIE
Stand Your Ground (2007)
Skip straight to Why Don't You Do It to hear the inspiration for the 'Saul theme and Barrie's sophisticated old-school playing

LITTLE BARRIE
Shadow (2014)
Bathed in film noir atmospherics, Shadow's dark grooves contain plenty of nods to psych, freakbeat and krautrock



PAUL WELLER
22 Dreams (2008)
For his ninth solo album, the Modfather recruited Little Barrie as a backing band on the title track's soulful stomp and its later, psychedelic reprise.

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Guitar & Bass INTRODUCES...

DAN PATLANSKY

Seven albums in, Dan Patlansky is finally being recognised for his superlative blues playing, and he's been reunited with the trusty Strat he nearly lost to Hurricane Katrina, too...

Story **Steve Bailey** | Photography **Mike Prior**

SOUTH African-born Dan Patlansky earned his dues the hard way, working his muscular blues in tiny clubs until his fingers bled on his SRV-inspired, cable-thick guitar strings.

In February 2014, he strapped on his trusty 1962 Stratocaster, led his power-trio out in front of a packed FNB Stadium in Johannesburg – capacity 95,000 – and played a blistering set of pile-driving blues rock to the masses. It was, admittedly, an opening slot for Bruce Springsteen, enjoyed by the Boss himself from the wings, but Patlansky's profile duly rocketed.

That breakthrough moment had been a while coming – Dan's latest album, *Dear Silence Thieves*, is in fact his seventh – but that means he's emerged a stellar, fully formed Strat-toting guitar hero, and he promises to be one of the faces of 2015.

Q You've played a 1962 Strat since you were 18 years old, how did you come by such a rare guitar at such a tender age?

"I call it 'Old Red' and it's one of kind, an unbelievable player. The neck fits my hand perfectly. I've been playing it for 15 years and it just feels like home. It's completely stock except for the Graph Tech saddles and replacement machineheads, and I had bigger frets put in.

"I bought it in the year 2000 from a vintage dealer in Johannesburg. In the 1990s, there were so many Strats that passed through this guy's shop. There's a lot of vintage guitars in South Africa: Strats, Les Pauls and all sorts, so he would find these guitars and ship them to the UK. I bugged this guy for years, saying 'come on, sell me one that I can afford!' I called him up once a week. Eventually, he sold me Old Red just to shut me up. He sold it to me for the equivalent of like £7,000, it was a steal."

Q Old Red was very nearly lost to Hurricane Katrina in 2005. How did that come about?

"I took up this opportunity to go to stay in New Orleans and tour in the States. One day, some guy came to my apartment and said, 'Are you evacuating tomorrow? There's a hurricane coming through.' The apartment block was literally next to the levee and I was on the ground floor. I didn't know what to expect, I thought it'd be just like a really big storm, so I ignored it. Then my manager came past my apartment and convinced me we had to get outta there! I grabbed the guitar and he said, 'No, you can't take that, there's no space!', so I jammed the flight case on top of the fridge, got out of there and just hoped for the best. We were evacuated to Alabama. We realised we couldn't get back into New Orleans, so I took off to Los Angeles because I've got family up there. Then I saw the news and saw New Orleans was 10 feet under water. I thought to myself 'that guitar is now floating down the Mississippi, there's no chance in a million years I'm getting it back.' I pretty much wrote it off then and there."

Q A bluesman without a guitar, that's not a situation that

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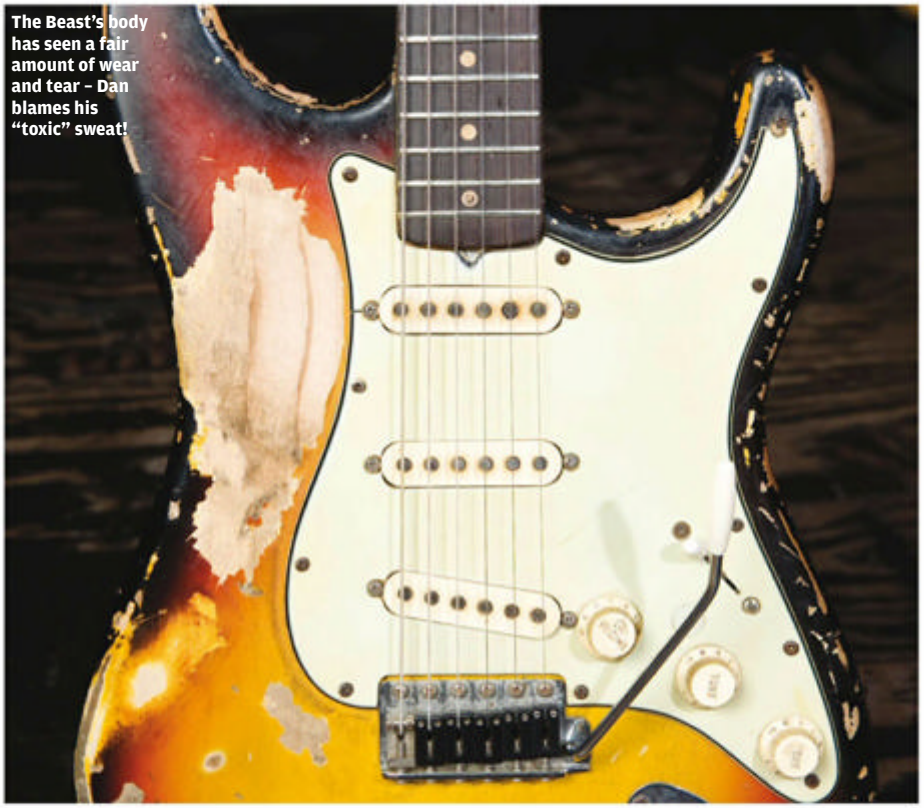
Old Red's neck now resides on The Beast



The Beast's body has seen a fair amount of wear and tear – Dan blames his "toxic" sweat!

could be tolerated for long in a city full of incredible music stores

"I did actually pick up another Strat, a sunburst, in a shop called Vintage Gear on Sunset Strip. I call it 'The Beast'. It was on the wall with a tag that said '1961 Strat. $2,000'. I thought that just couldn't be right. I started to play it and it played effortlessly and sounded great. Of course, they told me it was actually a Custom Shop Closet Classic, not an original, but I still had to have it. Due to Katrina, my whole management deal was kind of done and I just didn't have any work. I wasn't earning money, I was just spending money. I couldn't afford to live in LA without touring, so that's when I decided I had to go home."

Q So The Beast took Old Red's place for a year and then what happened?

"I was booked to play the Cape Town International Jazz Festival. They said they would like to fly out my American band to bring a bit of international flavour to the festival. I picked the guys up at the airport and I saw the bass player had a guitar case in his hand. It was really mouldy and shabby and I suddenly realised: that's my guitar case. He had gone back into the apartment when it was safe just to see what he could salvage, and he found the guitar on top of the fridge.

"The water line was about an inch or so below, so the guitar just made it by a hair. It didn't even get wet, but it was covered in mould and moisture. I took it out of the case, the strings were completely rusted. I just wiped it off, popped some new strings on it and played the guitar that night. It played great, man!"

Q It appears you've committed an act that will have many vintage guitar fans aghast...

"Old Red has always been the guitar on the records, but I've been alternating between the two Strats on the road for years now.

"What I'm currently touring with is a hybrid. I had the whole of January off this year, and I started experimenting. I took the neck, all the hardware, pickups and scratchplate off of Old Red and thought 'I wonder what it'll sound like on The Beast's body?' Man, I can't even tell you! It's created the most incredible combination. I know vintage freaks won't like that I've done that, but it's a simple case of me sticking that neck and scratchplate back on the red body, and it's back to the original. I'm calling it 'Mega-guitar' now."

Q So what about The Beast's neck and hardware? Is it now residing on Old Red's body?

"I tried it man, but they don't fit! The scratchplate is a little bit too narrow for the body, so the screw holes kind of hang over where the neck is supposed to slot in. It just didn't work out, so I've got all that stuff in safe keeping."

Q Both The Beast and Old Red have a fair bit of wear to the bodies – we actually thought they both must have had water damage because of the Katrina connection

"No, I think it's just my sweat. I think it's toxic! It's really not good for the paintwork of guitars. Every time there's a tiny ding, a whole load of paint flakes off, and now both those bodies have this big indentation in the wood and the wood is starting to flake off, which is a little more serious."

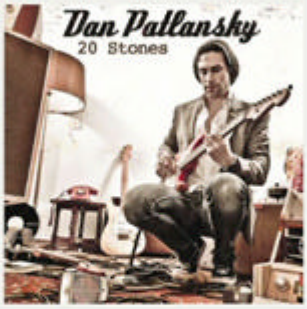
Q So the Mega-guitar is now your number one?

"I'm a minimalist. All I've got is a yellow '57 reissue Strat set up for slide, and the other two. So as two have now been morphed into one, I've effectively only got two electrics. I'm not a collector. I'm a firm believer that my guitars have a purpose and should earn their keep. The Mega-guitar is always on the road with me."

LISTEN UP

DAN PATLANSKY
Dear Silence Thieves (2015)
The current release sees Patlansky mix more rock into his crunching blues than has been the norm, and boasts the recording debut of his 'Mega-guitar'.

DAN PATLANSKY
20 Stones (2012)
For a listen to and a look at Dan's 1962 'Old Red' Strat in its original incarnation, check out this fiery, 10-track full-on blues assault.



AND ANOTHER THING... Dan loves a replacement pickup; he's tried dozens and his '62 Strat units could be superseded by some Australian Slider single coils. "I was flabbergasted when I tried them," he says.

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Riding Shotgun

James Burton's solo on Ricky Nelson's 1961 hit *Hello Mary Lou* was a lightning bolt for the likes of Brian May and Dave Davies, but for many, the Telecaster ace's career was defined by the eight years he spent taking care of business alongside Elvis Presley...

Story **Jeff Slate** | Photography **Getty Images**

"When I went to work with Elvis in 1969, I hadn't actually met him," reveals James Burton, who worked with Presley until the singer's death in 1977. "I knew about DJ Fontana from my hometown, Shreveport, Louisiana. And I'd played the Louisiana Hayride when I was 14 with George Jones, Johnny Horton, all the great country singers that came through. But I didn't meet Elvis until 1969 when I put the band together for him before we opened in Las Vegas at the International Hotel in August of that year. He called me on the phone at my home in LA, and I talked to him for two or three hours on the phone. He asked me if I'd be interested in going to Vegas and putting a band together for him. So I did."

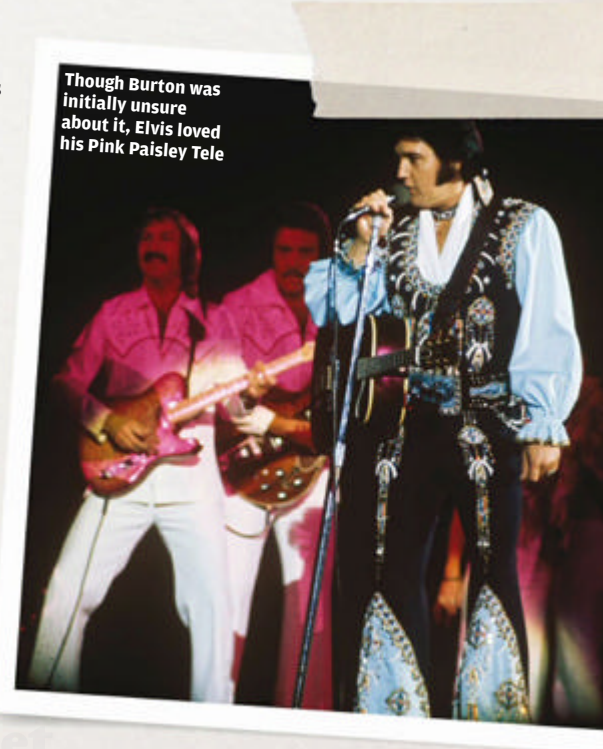
Burton's legendary licks can be heard on many of Presley's seminal latter-day tracks, such as *Suspicious Minds* and *Burning Love* – and, of course, Presley used to call out "Play it James!" in live shows before almost every Burton solo – but he can also be heard on a host of hits from the golden age of rock. Still, he's almost matter of fact when he talks about his work with Presley. He's worked with a long list of legends – including playing on Ricky Nelson's biggest hits, Buffalo Springfield's *A Child's Claim To Fame*, the original version of *Suzie Q* and with John Denver, not to mention having the distinction of turning down the opportunity to join Bob Dylan's first touring band. And although he worked closely with Presley for almost a decade and is closely identified with Presley's latter-day live recordings and his Taking Care of Business band, his comment about that first three-hour phone conversation with The King is startling.

"We just talked about everything," Burton says. "Mainly, we talked about the Ozzie and Harriet TV show, because he remembered watching me play guitar alongside Ricky Nelson. I have to admit I thought that was pretty cool. But then he said that when he told the people around him that he was getting ready to make some changes – to do some live shows and hopefully make some records – everybody he had talked to mentioned me. He was familiar with my work with Ricky and some of the other people I had played on records with. But it's funny, I was late for my session that day and I kept telling Elvis, 'Well, I've gotta go. I've gotta go to work.' But he just kept going on. He just wanted to talk. It was kind of like we knew each other already through the music we liked, which was pretty much the same: gospel, country, then rock 'n' roll, but also bluegrass, folk and everything."

> "There's only one Chet Atkins and Merle Travis. So I went for my own thing and my own style"

Soon, Burton was lining up players for Presley's band and putting them through their paces, in anticipation of their first rehearsal for Presley's triumphant return to live performance, in Las Vegas at the International Hotel on 31 July, 1969. He tapped Jerry Scheff on bass, John Wilkinson on rhythm guitar, Larry Muhoberac for keyboard duties and the man who became a fan favourite for his monstrous grooves behind The King, Ronnie Tutt, on drums. These were experienced hands; players who could handle the gig musically, but could also approach playing with the most famous performer in the world with their feet on the ground.

"It was plenty exciting when Elvis first arrived at rehearsals," Burton recalls. "But as famous as he was, when we met and shook >



Though Burton was initially unsure about it, Elvis loved his Pink Paisley Tele

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Burton at the 16th annual Rock and Roll Hall of Fame awards dinner at the Waldorf Astoria in New York City, March 2001

hands with each other, it was like we'd known each other our whole lives. It was almost like we had worked together because the style I played was kind of a mixture of the same influences he was using as a singer. Chet Atkins was my hero, and of course Merle Travis, Les Paul, and a lot of other guitar players, like Billy Byrd. A lot of great players. Anyway, that style was my style of playing. I'd already played a lot of Chet style and Merle Travis style, but long before I was working with Elvis I figured I'd put two and two together. There's only one Chet Atkins and Merle Travis. And anyway, I'm going to be JB. So I went for my own style and played all of that stuff that very first rehearsal. It was unbelievable. I knew I blew him away. And the band just blew him away, too. He loved it. Of course, the band I put together was a killer band," he says. A massive understatement.

Those rehearsals went well and Presley's stint in Vegas was a huge hit, with his appearances, which ran almost until his death, cited as one of the key factors that made Sin City a major holiday destination. It was also the beginning of a long association for Burton and the TCB band.

"I did everything from '69 up until he died," Burton says, a hint of sadness in his voice. "We did [the 1969 live album and film] *That's The Way It Is*. We recorded a lot of stuff; almost every show, in Vegas especially. And there was stuff like *Elvis On Tour*, and lots of other stuff they got on film. We also did all of Elvis' recordings, most of them in RCA Studio B. Quite a few there. And we did loads of recordings on the road. Of course, later we recorded at Graceland, in the Jungle Room. Those were great. They were really loose. And we went to Stax, too, and did a bunch of stuff. We had Tommy Cogbill on bass. And Reggie came down. So it was me and Reggie, Tommy Cogbill, and there was an acoustic guitar player, a great songwriter named Johnny Christopher."

> "He really got down to business. When the red light came on he would just go for it"

Burton's first sessions with Presley were at RCA Studios, but they didn't go well at first.

"I remember the first time we went there – it was in the summertime – it didn't really jive for him," Burton recalls. "They were short. We were squeezing them into the schedule, I think. But he wasn't really happy. About a year later, we went back. He had better songs, and it worked out a lot better."

On outtakes, even from those first sessions, the band sound great, and Presley is in fantastic form. We ask Burton what didn't click – was it the choice of songs?

"It didn't matter what song it was," he remembers. "Elvis would only do maybe three or four takes, at the most. His feeling was that if it didn't happen, if it didn't come together within three or four takes, it was time to go on to something else. But he'd flip through the songs, and we'd take a crack at it, and if the song was there – if the feeling was right – that would be the song he'd go for. But that first time in the studio that didn't seem to happen, even though now those tracks sound amazing."

We ask if, even that early in their relationship, Presley had already come to rely on Burton. "Oh yeah," he says, smiling. "He would always ask if I thought we could improve on something; if we should do another layer or something. He'd ask the band, too. He was always concerned about how we felt about it. Elvis was a really hard worker in the studio. He really got down to business. It was amazing. When the red light came on, he would just go for it."

By the time the sessions were over, Burton's relationship with Presley was cemented, and normal studio politics and hijinks between the musicians ensued.

"You know how studio work goes, you're trying things out – you're sampling different things when you go in and play on a session, trying different things out – because you've got a bunch of different guitars and different equipment. The producer or Elvis might want to have a 12-string on a track, for instance. I remember Glen Campbell and I always argued over who would have to play the 12-string. I don't mind playing it, but sometimes I didn't want to. So I'd give it over to Glen. I'd tell him he drew the short straw!"

Presley, Burton says, also had his own quirks and unique ways of doing things, much to the chagrin of some of the producers and engineers he worked with.

"Elvis used his own mic," Burton says. "He had a mic that was pretty much his own for live shows, and I even think he used that for the recordings. It was a handheld mic, >

SONGS IN THE KEY OF F

"I used my '52 Tele that very first day with Elvis," Burton says of his legendary Fender Telecaster. "My mother bought it for me. For a lot of my recordings with Elvis, I used a little Fender Deluxe. But most of the time I used a Fender Twin. Now I like to use the '65 Reissue. That's really the one I prefer, even over the old models. Once in a while, I would switch it with some different amps, but they'd send me over a lot of amps, too, and the Fender Twin and the Deluxe were usually my favourites. Since then I've put together a program with Fender for my Telecaster signature model. My buddy Dan Smith put that together, so I guess I'm a Fender guy through and through."

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Burton posing with members of his TCB Band, from left, Paul Leim (drums), Glen D. Hardin (piano) and Jerry Scheff (bass), in January 2009 in Vienna

not a U47 or some great tube mic. I imagine at times the producers convinced him to use better mics – but he always went back to his own mic. It had his name on it!"

Of course, legendarily, the TCB Band were at Presley's beck and call. "Elvis was a night owl," Burton remembers. "When he was ready to work, he wanted everybody else ready to work. We were always on call. But when I went to work with Elvis, I became family. That's how it felt and that's what he wanted. That made the hours and demands feel like nothing at all. Elvis loved us. And he loved guitar. He played a little piano and guitar himself. So every now and then he'd pick up a Gibson and play a little blues with us, just to have fun. But he loved guitar. When I'd play a hot lick or something, he'd turn around and say, 'Yeah baby, yeah! That's it!' You can hear it on the records, but really see it in the films of us, we just had this great communication on stage. That feedback was indescribable. He just made you feel good. He wanted you to feel good and happy. He wanted everything to be just right. That's just the way he was. If we had anything we were unhappy with or whatever, we could just tell him. Most of all, he wanted to hear the truth."

As the years passed, Presley did fewer live appearances and recorded less, especially in studios. But, Burton remembers, he still liked to play with the band at Graceland, usually in his 'Jungle Room', which had been turned into a rehearsal space and home studio. Contrary to popular belief, Burton says those sessions were fun and productive.

"It was a great atmosphere, really," he says. "There was no pressure, everybody was feeling good and nothing was tense. Sometimes, Elvis wouldn't come down till midnight or whatever, but we'd normally have a starting time around 6, 6.30, or 7 at night. So we'd just play and have a great time. Then he'd come down at midnight, or sometimes he'd come down even later. But, as a producer, I'd say, 'When Elvis comes down, no yawning. Everybody be ready to roll.

> "Elvis was a night owl. When he was ready to work, he wanted everybody else ready to work"

This is just the way he is so when he's ready to work, he wants everybody else to be ready.'"

The sessions were loose and informal, and unusual for the late-1970s, when big budgets allowed major recording artists to lock down state-of-the-art studios for months at a time, painstakingly overdubbing every part.

"We were in the same room with him," Burton remembers of the Jungle Room sessions. "We were pretty close. He liked to have the singers close by so they could have eye contact. He liked to have eye contact with everybody, but with reasonable separation. He wanted everybody close, so when it came time for me to play a solo, he'd let me know. He always kept his eye on me to get into a good groove, too. He really enjoyed eye contact with everybody. So it was really a performance in the truest sense, and he was acting as both performer and producer. We'd have a producer, but the bottom line was that Elvis had the final say. Of course, when he went home, the producer still had work, but everything was pretty much down to his final say.

"There were times I might have disagreed with him, because, you know, all the takes would be good. But if there was something we didn't agree on or feel was right, then he would do another take. But it was just that when Elvis felt it was locked in, that was pretty much it. He was a pretty sharp guy. He knew if the first, second, third or fourth take was the best. So if something came to him that he didn't like, it would be changed."

As we wrap up our conversation, we realise that often, when speaking of Presley, Burton talks in the present tense, and that his love is apparent when discussing even the most minor detail of their relationship.

"I just think about what a great guy he was," Burton says. "He was a great man and an incredible person to work with. He was always concerned if you were happy or if everything was OK. If you were unhappy with anything, he wanted to know right away. He was very concerned about his family and the people that were close to him. If something wasn't right, he would make it right."

LISTEN UP

ELVIS PRESLEY
That's The Way It Is (1970)
Comprising eight tracks from RCA Studio B and four live cuts from Vegas, this LP was released to accompany the documentary

ELVIS PRESLEY
Elvis On Tour (1972)
The only Elvis movie to be issued without an official soundtrack, this is essential viewing for all fans of the TCB band. *American Trilogy*, *Burning Love* – it's all here

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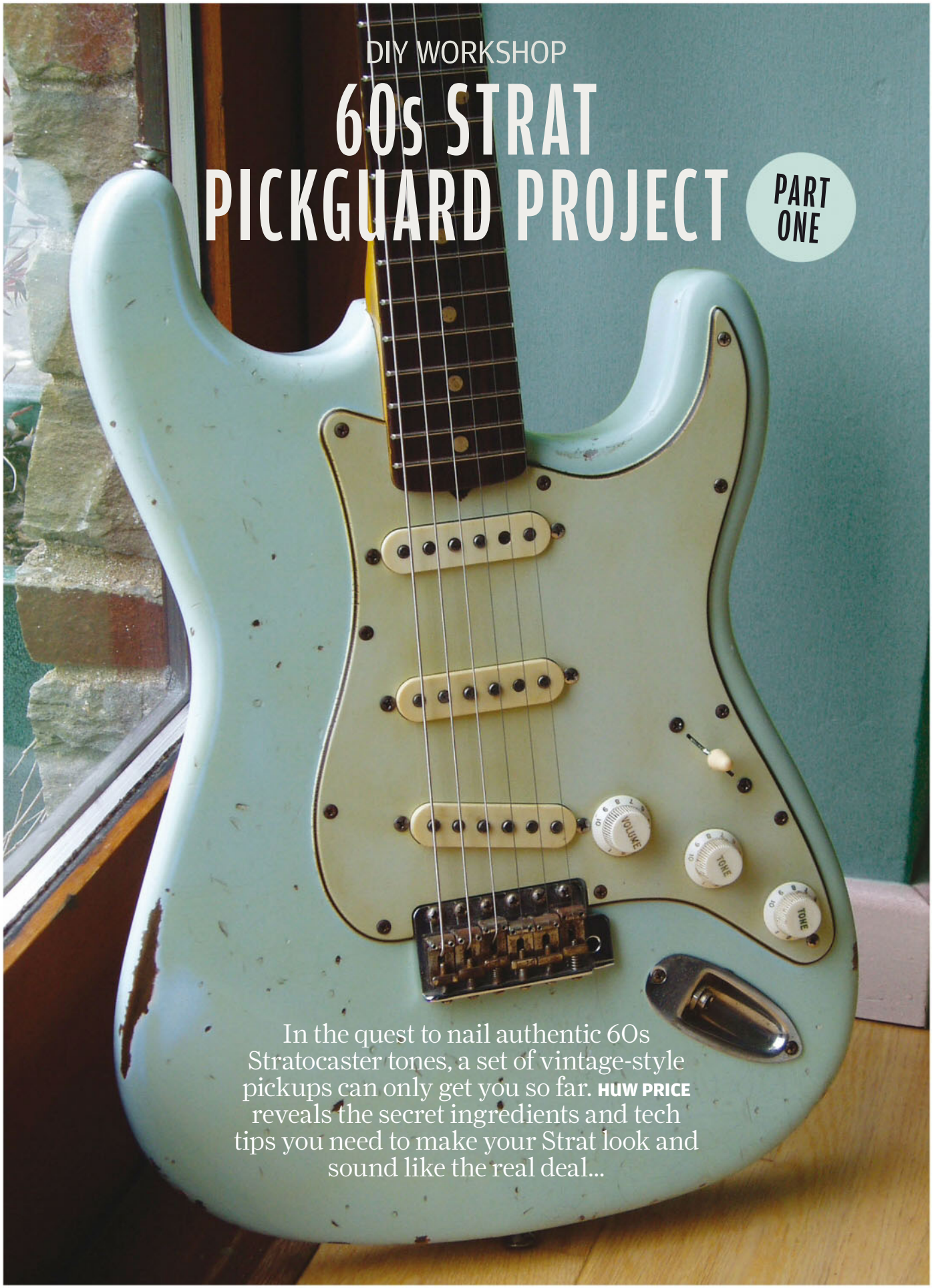

DIY WORKSHOP

60s STRAT PICKGUARD PROJECT

PART ONE

In the quest to nail authentic 60s Stratocaster tones, a set of vintage-style pickups can only get you so far. **HUW PRICE** reveals the secret ingredients and tech tips you need to make your Strat look and sound like the real deal...

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1 Choose your guard carefully; there's a world of difference between how close some of the vintage reproductions on the market appear when compared to a 1960s original.

2 This pickguard from a '62 Strat has the original pickups, but the tone potentiometers and capacitor are from a later Strat. There's a mix of original cloth- and plastic-covered wire. The switch is a very old five-way and a treble bleed cap has been soldered across the volume control.

This first Workshop instalment will identify all of the components and parts needed to put together an early-60s style Stratocaster pickguard assembly. It's not all about the look; we'll also discuss how certain parts have a noticeable effect on tone.

When you look under a Stratocaster scratchplate it can seem like a rat's nest of wires. Older guitars will usually have been worked on several times over the years, and all too often you may see a mash-up of different parts with a mixture of plastic- and cloth-covered wiring. Very few vintage guitars have survived with the original wiring intact, but when you examine pictures of original examples, it's obvious that Fender has always had a very precise way of doing things. **2**

Many of us will need to wire up a Strat pickguard from time to time, whether it's to restore an old guitar, upgrade a cheaper model or perhaps to create a full-on aged replica. In this first instalment of our pickguard project, I'll be documenting the parts you will need to nail the looks as well as the sound of an early-60s Stratocaster.

There's a lot more to recreating 60s Strat tones than simply buying a set of boutique pickups. Understanding how these parts interact to affect the tone of a guitar will help you get the results you want and maybe even spare you from the merry-go-round of endless pickup swapping.

Picking the guard

There are always certain parts that are almost impossible to get right on aged or distressed guitars. Replicating the wear on maple fingerboards is notoriously difficult, as is simulating the verdigris effect on Gibson goldtops. When it comes to 60s-style Strats, the pickguards invariably let them down. The changeover to rosewood fingerboards coincided with a new three-ply pickguard that was made from celluloid nitrate. This volatile material is prone to cracking and shrinking, as well as being highly combustible. So it's understandable that Fender decided to stop using the stuff in the mid-60s, and it now doesn't even use celluloid nitrate for the Custom Shop relics.

It's a shame, because the look of those original 'green guards' is quite unlike the PVC plastic replicas. Although some replicas can look decent enough, the deep sheen, translucency and colour of celluloid guards was utterly distinctive – especially with 50 years or more to develop a patina.

White three-ply celluloid sheet is fairly easy to come by, and some have used it to make pickguards. Unfortunately, despite concerted efforts, it has been found that white celluloid does not turn green, no matter how much time it spends in the sun.

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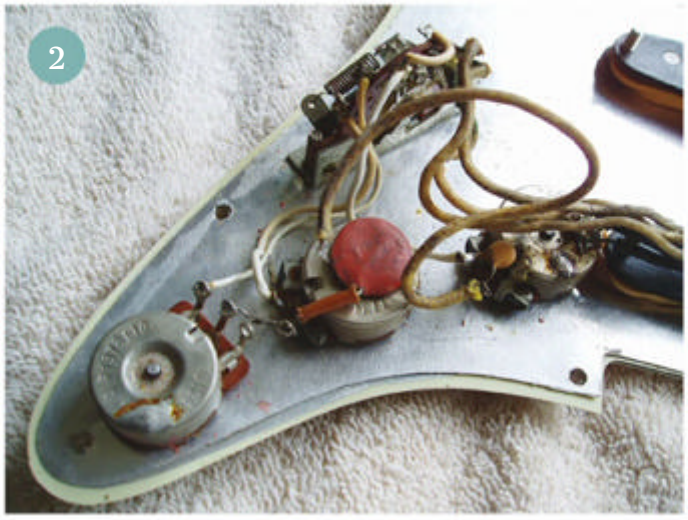

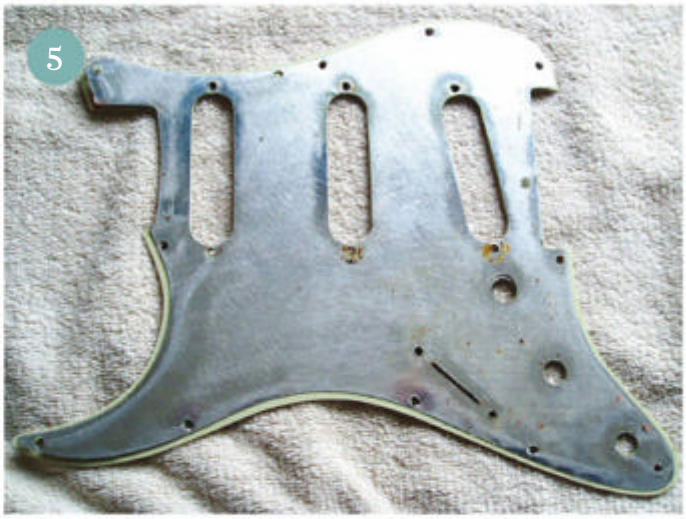

With that in mind, I was interested to learn about a Canadian company called Groovy Guitars that sells green pickguards made from celluloid nitrate. At $99 (Canadian), Groovy Guards are not a cheap option, but having said that, they're made from the real thing and they don't cost that much more than certain PVC replicas from Japan and Germany. 3

The guards are not aged, but they are claimed to be the same shade that would have been seen on pre-CBS Stratocasters when they were brand new. I decided to take a chance and went out and got one for this project.

Groovy Guards are cut beautifully and have a stiffer and weightier feel than PVC repros. At 0.1 inches, they're the correct thickness – and they have the correct bevel angle, too. They're also very accurately cut, lining up perfectly on two genuine pre-CBS bodies as well as bodies from Guitar Build and Allparts.

So, what about the colour? Groovy Guitars claims that the colour matches the back of vintage pickguards as well as the areas under the control knobs – which can be very much lighter than the surrounding areas. I tested the claim against an original '61 pickguard and I'm pleased to report that Groovy Guitars has it pretty much spot on. 4

But the issue remains – do you want to wait 30 years for a celluloid pickguard to age naturally, or can the process be kickstarted? I decided to find out, and I was delighted with the way it turned out – but you will have to check back next month in order to learn how to do it yourself.

Shielding plate

Most Strat players are prepared to put up with some noise because they prefer the tone of single-coil pickups to humbuckers. Even so, Fender used a small shielding plate through the 1950s, before moving over to a full-sized 14-gauge aluminium shield late in the decade, which lasted until 1967.

Aluminium is regarded as a very effective material for providing protection against noise, but the aluminium shield also has an effect on the sound of Stratocasters. Apparently, this is due to 'paramagnetism', which softens and smoothes out edgier overtones in the upper midrange. In other words, a shielding plate can give your guitar a sweeter and more vintage tone.

I have tried this for myself and found the effect of the shield is clearly audible. The midrange took on a rounder quality, with single notes producing a more vocal 'ooh' tone. Most players dive straight into pickup upgrades to achieve 'vintage' tone, but with aluminium shields being readily available for as little as £10, it's something that's surely worth trying first. 5 >

3 This pickguard from Groovy Guitars in Canada is made from celluloid nitrate and the colour is intended to be identical to the way Fender's guards looked when they were brand new. Here's how it compares to a well-worn '61 pickguard.

4 Comparing the colour of the Groovy Guitars guard with the area under the tone knob on the '61 guard, we think it's an excellent match.

5 This is an original '61 Fender shielding plate on the back of a pickguard awaiting reinstallation of pickups and controls during a restoration project. If you want to do this job properly, you'll need to buy one. However, they are fairly inexpensive.

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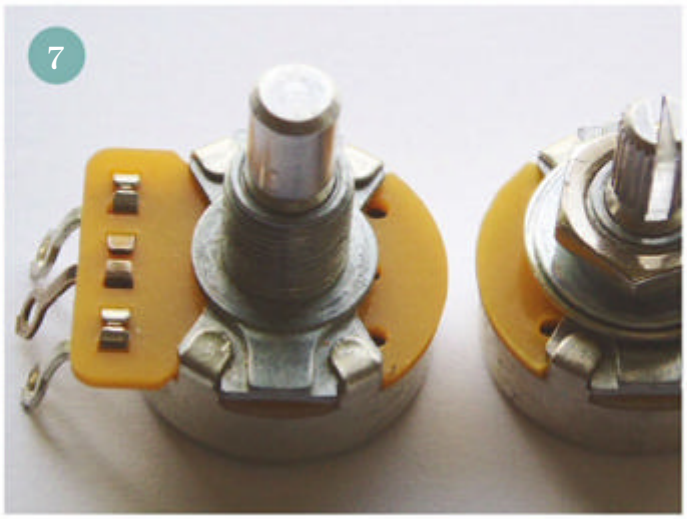

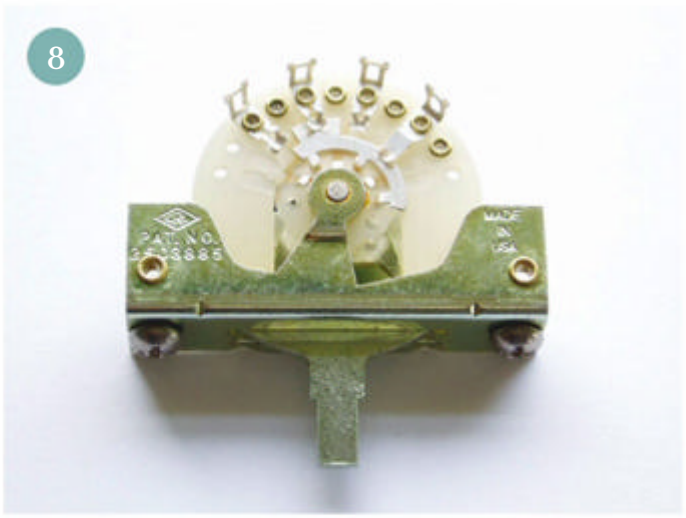

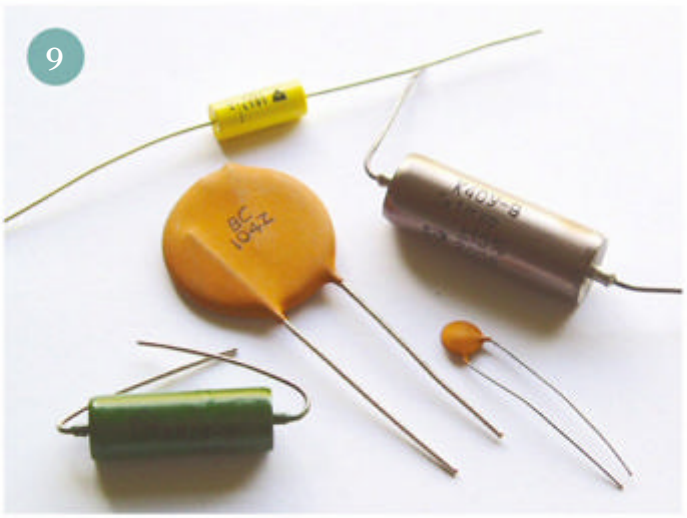

6 These CTS 250K potentiometers are ideal for this project. They don't look quite like those that Fender used in the early 60s, but they're close enough.

7 Strats and Les Pauls have control knobs that push onto the potentiometer shafts, so you'll need split-shaft pots. Solid-shaft potentiometers are used for control knobs with grub screws, like the ones used on Telecasters. You can see a solid shaft on the left and a split shaft on the right.

8 This CTS five-way switch is perfect for our project. It lines up with the screw holes of USA spec pickguards and the connection lugs correspond to most of the wiring schematics you'll find online.

Controls

For early-60s style Strat controls, you'll need three 250K potentiometers and a five-way switch – or a three-way switch if you want to be a purist. Most builders, including Fender, seem to use CTS-branded potentiometers, and Allparts UK offers a couple of options – one of which is described as 'vintage style'. 6 Some people prefer Bournes pots because they feel faster and smoother.

Audio (log) is the best option for the volume control, but opinions differ on the subject of tone pots, depending on the preferred response. Whichever potentiometers you choose, it is essential that they have split shafts for Strat-style push-on knobs. 7

If you use your pickup selector a lot, it seems unwise to compromise on quality. The CRL and Oak Grigsby switches work well and are reasonably faithful to vintage originals. Unfortunately, the securing screws won't look quite right, but we'll come back to that later. 8

Capacitor

Lastly, you'll need to choose a tone capacitor. Reproductions of the early-style 'phone book' types are available from various suppliers, such as Allparts and Northwest Guitars. They certainly look the part, but they are very expensive and underneath the wax and paper wrapping they're just modern-style film capacitors.

A ceramic 'dime'-style capacitor will be cheaper and completely authentic – especially for early-60s replicas, and Northwest Guitars sells those, too.

Ceramic capacitors can be microphonic, too, which adds a certain something to the high-frequency response. If tone is more important to you than aesthetics, some popular alternatives include silver mica, Mallory 150s, Sprague Orange Drops, Vitamin Qs and Russian K40Y or K42Y paper in oil (PIO). 9

For the first decade of production, Fender installed 0.1uF capacitors in Stratocasters. 10 Around 1964, the cap value was changed to 0.047uF and this is significant because some treble is always lost through tone circuits – even when they're supposedly off. Strats with 0.047uF caps will sound slightly brighter than those with 0.1uF – due partly to the higher roll-off frequency, but more importantly because the resonance peak around the roll-off occurs higher in the audio spectrum.

It's simple enough to hook up an AB switch, or even a rotary switch, to compare capacitors. Most electronics engineers will probably tell you that all caps of the same value should sound the same. In contrast, most guitarists who have taken the time to compare tone caps will probably tell you the

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opposite. Finding out for yourself can be a lot of fun, and even if you end up spending £10 on a tone capacitor, that's still considerably cheaper than buying a set of hand-wound pickups.

Pickups

All of this brings us neatly around to choosing a set of pickups. Although pots, caps and shields all play their part in this complex sonic equation, pickups remain the most important factor. We'll save pickup comparisons for another time, but there are some key features you should look out for if you want a set of pickups that will deliver convincing vintage tone.

It's obvious that vintage-correct materials and construction methods increase the likelihood that a set of replica pickups will sound 'right'. The originals were made with hand-bevelled and staggered Alnico V slugs, and for 60s-style Strat pickups most modern winders tend to favour weakened Alnico Vs. Some alternatives include the naturally weaker Alnico IV and Alnico III alloys.

Formvar magnet wire is another period feature. It was coated with an insulating layer of polyvinyl formal varnish (hence 'formvar'), and when two coats were applied rather than one, it was known as 'heavy formvar'.

During the mid-60s, Fender began using plain enamel magnet wire rather than formvar and most guitarists agree that they sound different. They look different, too – the formvar's coppery red contrasting with the purple hue of plain enamel. 11

Of course, there are other factors at play, but the consensus seems to be that formvar has more harmonic overtones, with extra highs and lows, scooped mids and a generally woodier sound.

It is also important that the coil should be 'scatter wound' to a DC resistance somewhere between 5.9K and 6.2K.

The idea that players such as Stevie Ray Vaughan used overwound pickups is probably a hangover from some misleading pickup advertising during the 1980s and based more on fantasy than fact. Consequently, vintage tone fans should be sceptical of any set of 'vintage-style' pickups if the description of them contains words such as 'hot', 'barbecue' or 'Texas'. They may sound fantastic in their own right, but they're unlikely to sound like early-60s pickups.

Lastly, it's worth considering that vintage sets did not have calibrated windings. Most were wound to more or less the same DC resistance, installed randomly then the height adjustment screws were used to balance them up.

Invariably, the bridge will end up closest to the strings and the neck unit will be some distance away. Personally, I prefer non-calibrated >

9 Pre-CBS Strats had 0.1uF (100nF) capacitors, and the value is important if you want authentic 60s tone. Here, we see a couple of ceramic discs, a modern film capacitor from Vishay and a couple of Russian paper/oil types.

10 This is an original 'phonebook'-style capacitor in an unmolested '56 Strat. You can buy amazing looking replicas, but inside they are just modern film types, rather than paper/wax.

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11 The late-60s style pickup on the right has plain enamel magnet wire. Compare this with the copper-coloured formvar wire on the early-60s style pickup to its left.

12 This set of '62 replica pickups from Monty's Guitars was hand-wound here in the UK. They tick all the right boxes, with hand-bevelled Alnico slugs, formvar magnet wire, scattered windings and, most importantly, distinctive tone.

sets because once properly set up, each pickup will have a more distinctive tone.

Pickups from calibrated sets tend to end up at more or less the same distance from the strings, and they can sound more like variations on a single theme as a result.

The proximity of the magnetic slugs to the strings also inhibits vibration, which can make the guitar sound out of tune in the upper registers and reduce sustain. Since two of the pickups on a non-calibrated set will end up some distance from the strings, there's less magnetic pull and the guitar will resonate more freely.

There are hundreds of boutique pickup winders out there, all claiming to make the most authentic replicas available. For this feature, Monty's Guitars very kindly supplied us with a '62 set, and I'd would have to say that they are among the best early-60s style pickups I've tried. 12

All these pickup specs can be confusing, but knowing about the key constituents will help you to make more informed choices when you decide it's time to upgrade.

What's next?

Well, that's all of the necessary theory covered, the shopping list has been written and it's time to apply a bit of ageing before loading up the pickguard and hooking everything up. Unfortunately, we've run out of space this issue, so check out next month's DIY Workshop to see how it all turns out.

PARTS SUPPLIERS

- **Pickguard** Groovy Guitars **www.groovy-guitars.com**
- **Shield plate** Horny's Guitar Parts **eBay shop**
- **Potentiometers & switch** Allparts UK **www.allparts.uk.com**
- **Capacitor** Northwest Guitars **www.northwestguitars.co.uk**
- **Pickups** Monty's Guitars **www.montysguitars.com**

NEXT MONTH...

With the theory out of the way, we can finally get started on the fun part! To finish off this project, we'll be investigating various ageing and distressing techniques before putting everything together and installing the loaded pickguard onto a guitar.

To read part two of our 60s Strat pickguard project, pick up a copy of the August issue of *Guitar & Bass*, on sale 3 July, 2015.

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PRS S2 VELA £1,404
ELECTRIC GUITAR

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PRS S2 Vela

Affordable, American and original – is the Vela PRS's coolest ever electric? **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** plugs in...

Launched in 2013, the S2 project was PRS's answer to the affordable American-made electric guitar conundrum. In order for PRS to deliver more wallet-friendly USA instruments, all S2 models are manufactured in the same Stevensville, Maryland factory as the company's higher-priced 'Core' models but on a separate, faster production line using a mixture of USA and offshore hardware and pickups.

The Vela – also the Latin word for a ship's sails, the Spanish word for wakefulness and the name of a constellation in the southern sky – is the latest addition to the S2 family.

Though it contains instruments that possess more traditional PRS appointments, such as the Singlecut, Custom 22 and Custom 24, the S2 line is also home to PRS's most overtly retro-influenced guitars, the Mira and Starla.

The Vela arrives with similar styling cues to the latter pair, but has the distinction of being the first S2 design not to have appeared previously elsewhere in the company's catalogue. Another first: it's also PRS's offset body debut, featuring a silhouette created by cutting a Custom outline in half, shifting the bass side forwards and redrawing the lines.

In combination with the scratchplate shape, there's a knowing nod to pawnshop, indie-rock aesthetics here, as PRS chases a generation of players to whom heavily figured maple tops and boutique pricing are perceived to be unappealing. This is further emphasised by electronics that lean similarly towards the leftfield; the Vela borrows the Starla's treble humbucker and flips it around so the slug coil is closest to the bridge and brings an entirely new pickup to the party in the bass position: the DeArmond Dynasonic-influenced Type-D single coil.

A design for a new demographic it may be, but the Vela still owes plenty to the company's innovative history

A new design for a new demographic it may be, but of course the Vela still owes plenty to the company's richly innovative history. The optional bird inlays here – which first appeared on the instrument that Smith built for Peter Frampton in 1976 – are just one example; the twin brass saddles on the Vela's 'Plate-Style' bridge echo the design that Smith developed for the Sorcerer's Apprentice guitar from 1982, on his way to perfecting the Stoptail that first became available in 1991. Here in 2015, the two-saddle concept, as utilised on the Vela, appears in a more Fender-like configuration, with a pair of Telecaster-style brass rods handling three strings per side.

The saddles are perched on a reassuringly chunky nickel-plated aluminium base that resembles >

The Type-D neck pickup is unique to the Vela

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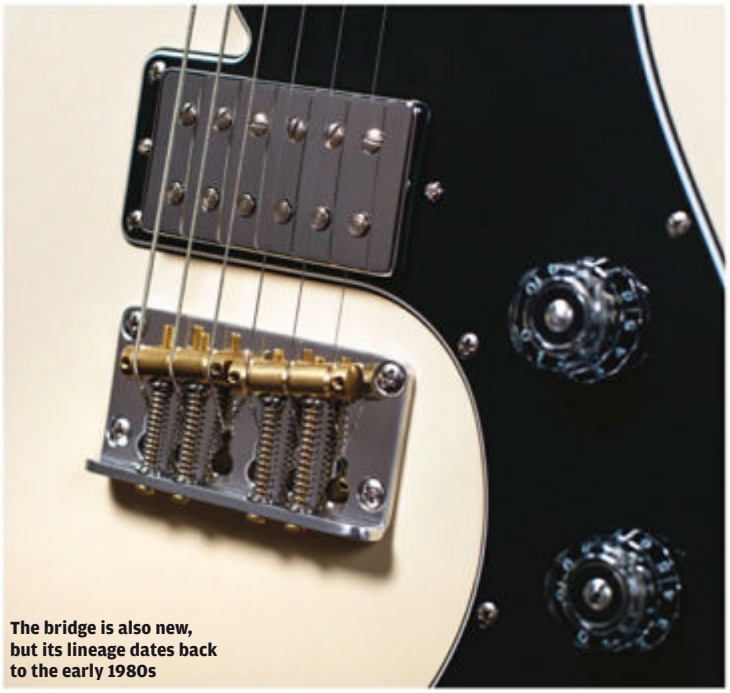
KEY FEATURES

PRS S2 Vela

- **DESCRIPTION** Offset double-cutaway solidbody electric, manufactured in the USA
- **PRICE** £1,404 (as reviewed) £1,289 with dot inlays. Includes gigbag
- **BUILD** One-piece mahogany body, three-piece mahogany set neck with Pattern Regular profile, 10-inch (254mm) radius rosewood fingerboard with ivoroid bird inlays and 22 medium jumbo frets
- **HARDWARE** PRS Plate-Style bridge with brass saddles. S2 locking machineheads
- **ELECTRICS** PRS S2 Starla Treble humbucker (bridge) and Type-D single coil (neck). Three-way toggle pickup selector switch. Master volume, master tone (pull/push coil split for bridge pickup)
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25 inches (635mm)
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.8mm at nut, 52.5mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK** 22mm at first fret, 23.5mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 52.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 6.8lbs/3.08kgs
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISHES** Antique White (as reviewed), Black, McCarty Tobacco Sunburst, Seafoam Green, Sienna, Vintage Cherry, Vintage Mahogany
- **CONTACT** PRS Europe 01223 874301 **www.prsguitars.com**

The Vela's body is a new, offset shape, but its headstock is familiar


The bridge is also new, but its lineage dates back to the early 1980s

The Vela's sleek contours are player-friendly

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
With its combination of humbucking soapbar at the neck and open-coil Burstbucker III at the bridge, Gibson's mahogany/maple, self-tuning **SG Futura £849** is one for the open-minded. Fender's **Johnny Marr Jaguar £1,709** is a very different animal, but combines vintage offset lineage with contemporary road-proofing.

a hardtail Strat bridge, but the Vela isn't strung through-body; the ball-ends of the strings reside in a shallow cavity beneath individual cut-outs in the base plate. In practice, this pseudo-toploader design gives the strings a relatively steep break angle over the saddles, meaning there's still plenty of tension – the feel down at the bridge is taut with a Telecaster-like snap.

Sweeter and less brash than a PAF, the bridge pickup has a great clean tone with bags of dynamic range

The saddles are screw-adjustable, both for height and intonation, and although a six-saddle assembly would theoretically offer more precision, at no point was the Vela found wanting on either the intonation or tuning stability fronts during our testing.

Though appearances and the production line differ from the company's Core instruments, the Vela's feel has USA PRS running through it like a stick of Maryland rock. The comfortable, rounded C profile of the Pattern Regular neck is based on the carve of regular PRS necks of the late 1980s, while its 10-inch 'board radius, familiar fretwire and 25-inch scale length all add up to deliver the kind of highly-evolved, player-friendly experience on which Smith has built his empire to date.

The offset design gives the Vela a compact feel, whether standing or seated, and it balances superbly when strapped on, with a light weight that ought to make lengthy performances a breeze in comparison to many other mahogany-bodied electrics. In short, there's nothing here that gets in the way of the important matter at hand: making music.

In use

Played clean, the Starla Treble humbucker has a Gretsch-like accent; when compared directly to a Filter'Tron, there's not quite as much innate growl or harmonic complexity in the lower midrange, but you certainly benefit from a similarly appealing treble attack.

Sweeter and less brash than a PAF, it's a great clean tone with bags of dynamic range under the fingers that can be sweet or explosive depending on the ferocity of your right hand. Clean chords are sumptuous, too: chimey and present, inflicting nowhere near as much of the ear fatigue that a traditional bridge humbucker can induce in this context.

Moving into crunch territory, where a PAF-style 'bucker in an all-mahogany instrument can crowd the midrange, the Vela leaves more space, while remaining authoritative – it's a boon for recording, and whether you use that space for effects or overdubs is up to

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you. While the bridge humbucker mode covers several decades of rock 'n' roll raunch, from *Sticky Fingers* to modern indie, if you need more airy jangle and a little less grit, simply pull the tone pot – it's a great voice for 60s-influenced power-pop that never gets too brittle thanks to the natural midrange push of mahogany.

Flipping from the bridge pickup in full humbucking mode to the Type-D single coil in the neck position, there's a noticeable drop in output, though the balance can be remedied by raising the neck pickup's height a little from its factory position.

The Dynasonic influence is there, but with more balance; it's less of a junkyard dog straining at the leash and instead provides a more neutral canvas for expression. PRS's Jim Cullen describes the Type-D as a cross between a '54 Strat and a DeArmond, commenting that "a lot of neck pickups can be muddy. We wanted it to be clear as a sunny day and take pedals well." While we're inclined to agree, to our ears there's also a hint of Teisco Gold Foil in the Type-D's balance of clarity and smoothness – it's a sound that's in vogue right now, and for good reason: it's a wonderful voice for reverb-drenched slide, heavily-effected atmospherics, fuzzy riffs, garage blues and much more. The neck pickup in conjunction with the bridge in coil-split mode is yet another highly musical voice from a guitar that's twangy, snappy and full of sass across the board but possesses plenty of girth when required, too.

Ultimately, cool is in the eye – and ear – of the beholder. Whether or not the Vela proves to be a hit with a younger crowd, this is a serious guitar for sensible money with a juicy array of tones. If the birds are too flash for you, save yourself the cost of a decent stompbox and go for the dot neck version; it might just become a cult classic.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Wonderful clean jangle and edgy drive tones
+ Rock-solid build quality
+ Ergonomic, player-friendly design
+ Outstrips similarly-priced competition

– Small traces of buffing compound residue around several frets

PRS may be targeting a younger, hipper audience but there's much here to please players of all ages looking for edgy tones from a dependable instrument

9/10

It's a PRS Jim, but not as we know it

Paul Reed Smith's national sales manager, Jim Cullen, has been a major player in the evolution of the S2 Series. The Vela's development, which began around 18 months ago, saw Jim and R&D project engineer Jon Wasserman combine their love of old offset instruments with a desire to produce a unique-looking and sounding guitar without compromising on quality.

"In the end, it's pretty simple," says Jim. "The way a guitar looks will make you want to try it, the way it feels will make you want to plug it in, and finally the way it sounds – if we did our job – will make you want to spend your hard-earned money and purchase it. Those factors are continually important to us. It's a fashion statement and a tool for musicians to rely on night after night…

"We took our Custom silhouette, cut it in half, shifted the top portion forward about 1 1/8 inches [28.5mm], erased the line between the upper and lower horns and the butt end and redrew them. Once that was done, we tweaked the drawing. This process took a few months. Moving a line a hair makes all the difference, so once we got the silhouette where we were mostly happy, it was time for the pickguard. We had the bottom portion of the guard mostly worked out and it was pretty traditional, but we wanted something funky and different, so Jon drew the opposing line that is the top portion of the guard, and it changed the vibe of the guitar. We tweaked that for about a month, tightened up some lines and when we were happy, showed it to Paul. He made a few minor changes to the pickguard and then we ran a guitar. The

"We ran prototypes of the Vela with our Stoptail and the Plate-Style bridge – the Plate-Style won the shoot-out"

assembled prototype was close but needed tweaking, so we worked on the upper horn again and flattened out the butt end, which resulted in another necessary tweaking of the pickguard to getting it to the shape you see today."

The Vela's bridge was the result of a similarly collaborative process: "Paul has a patent on 'two sets of three' from the early eighties, which is reflected in his 'pre-factory' guitars. That said, roughly five or six years ago, Paul and Jon [Wasserman] designed two versions of a plate bridge: a version of what you see on the Vela today and a vibrato version. We abandoned it, as it wasn't right at the time. I saw it on Jon's desk and said something to the effect of, 'for what we're going for with this guitar, that is the bridge for the Vela'. In fact, it's a cool platform for us to expand on moving forward. We mostly agreed internally, so to test our theory we ran prototypes of the Vela with our stoptail and this new Plate-Style bridge – due diligence to see which one sounded 'better'. Obviously, for what we were going for, the Plate-Style bridge won the shoot-out.

"We knew we wanted a Starla Treble pickup, slug-side-on to better balance with the desired single-coil pickup in the bass position. It took a month or so to get that bass pickup right. After some initial stabs at it, we called in the heavy gun – Paul – and he said: 'How do you want it to sound?' We said: 'Clear, warm and musical without sounding muddy'. He said, 'do X, Y and Z and you should have what you're looking for'. We wound the pickup in-house and damn if we didn't find what we were looking for. We put the final prototype together and started giving it the 'shop test'. It was pretty unanimous that we had what we thought was a winner, but to test the theory, I showed it to dealers we had circulating through the factory for Wood Library or Private Stock visits. Next, we got some local artists to field test the guitar. We listened to all the feedback, tweaked the design and the Vela was born. We're passionate about making the best products we can… tools for musicians."

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D'Angelico EX Series Style B

If the name D'Angelico conjures up an image in your mind, it's probably something like this. **HUW PRICE** takes a closer look...

This type of instrument epitomises the 1930s jazz aesthetic and recalls the birth of the electric guitar. The Korean factory has certainly nailed the classic sunburst; the amber centre is spot on – not too yellow, nor too orange – and there's a smooth transition into a deep tobacco brown. The figured maple back and sides and spruce top are laminated, while the three-piece neck is a maple and rosewood sandwich with a black-stained rosewood 'board.

The controls and 'floating' mini-humbucker are all mounted on the pickguard; with edging to match the multi-ply body binding, it could almost pass for celluloid. Factor in the gold-plated stairstep tailpiece, Grover Super Rotomatic tuners and skyscraper truss-rod cover, and the Style B makes a serious visual statement.

In use

At 17 inches across and three deep, I expected the Style B to be something of a handful, but the slim neck profile, 24.5-inch scale and low action keep things player-friendly.

In essence, this is an acoustic guitar with a pickup rather than an electric semi, and as such it can be approached from two angles.

Acoustic mode impresses with a loud, bright and full-bodied tone combining sweet treble and sonorous bass with impressive sustain. It's a far cry from the brash, cut-through-at-all-costs voice that characterises lesser archtops, confining them to chord-comping.

Refined and classy, it offers something refreshingly different to flat-tops that's very responsive; you can explore different tones by using various plectrum gauges or your thumb. The stock roundwounds suit the guitar, producing an even tonal response, particularly with the tricky transition from wound G to plain B.

The pickup does an adequate job of producing a clear and uncoloured signal, but heavy potting eliminates any acoustic character. Old-school guitars deserve valve amps, and after experimenting, I settled on a Fender Vibro Champ for authentic jazz tones. In contrast to jazzboxes such as the ES-175, best results hinge on balancing mic'd acoustic and amplified sounds, whether live or in the studio.

The acoustic side provides cut and definition, while the electric voice adds girth and bolsters bass. Using a small valve combo set on the edge of overdrive, without feedback, allows the Style B to push the amp into the kind of warm, dynamically driven overload heard on classic jazz recordings when soloists were digging in.

Rolling back the volume cleans things up, allowing more acoustic sound through and making the tone knob behave more like a 'midrange prominence' control. It's big, clear, woody, and a far cry from the anodyne burble that often passes for jazz tone.

Dispensing with the negatives, the nut overhangs the headstock front and the finish is a tad thick around the neck join. The guitar would benefit from light sanding to soften the top edges of the bridge and a pickup upgrade.

Refined and classy, the Style B offers something refreshingly different to flat-tops that's very responsive

Though it appears niche, the Style B is versatile. Jazz is the obvious application, assuming you're happy to solo below the 14th fret, but it can handle jump blues, western swing and old-time country picking with equal aplomb.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Fantastic looks
+ Easy playability
+ Impressive acoustic tone

– Top laminated rather than solid
– Disappointing pickup
– Finish build-up around neck joint
– Art Deco knobs would look better

Once you learn to balance the acoustic and electric tones and figure out the controls, the Style B's versatility, rich tonality and easy playability shine

8/10

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE... The affordable **Loar LH-309-VS £312** has a V-shaped neck and a P-90 style pickup. The **Gretsch G100CE £714** has a floating pickup and a single cutaway. **Godin's 5th Avenue Kingpin £525** is a non-cutaway archtop with a Canadian wild cherry body.

KEY FEATURES

D'Angelico EX Series Style B

- **DESCRIPTION** Archtop acoustic guitar with pickup. Manufactured in Korea
- **PRICE** $1,559
- **BUILD** Laminated spruce top, laminated flame maple back and sides with three-piece maple/rosewood neck, 20-fret rosewood fingerboard with pearl block inlays, rosewood bridge, bone nut, die-cast Grover Super Rotomatic tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Floating mini humbucker
- **CONTROLS** Volume and tone
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISH** Vintage Sunburst
- **SCALE LENGTH** 622mm/24.5"
- **NECK WIDTH**
  Nut: **42mm**
  12th fret: **55mm**
- **DEPTH OF NECK**
  First fret: **19mm**
  12th fret: **21mm**
- **STRING SPACING**
  Nut: **35.5mm**
  Bridge: **54mm**
- **WEIGHT** 3.1kg/6.8lbs
- **CONTACT** Marshall Distribution UK, 01908 375411
  www.dangelicoguitars.com

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American Beauties

They're all hand-made with high-quality components, custom transformers and finger-jointed cabinets, but that's where the similarities end. **HUW PRICE** samples three contrasting slices of boutique American pie...

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Magnatone Super 15, Bad Cat Bobcat 20R & Swart Space Tone 45

Although many boutique amps still have a retro vibe, it's no longer enough to simply rehash vintage designs. These days, boutique amp buyers can expect more features, greater versatility and real-world practicality. For those of you with the necessary funds, it keeps getting better.

In order to get an overview of what the contemporary US boutique amp scene has to offer, here's a trio of amplifiers with very different sounds and cosmetics from brands with a reputation for high quality where it counts. Admission prices start off at reassuringly expensive and quickly blast off into the stratosphere. Strap yourselves in...

Magnatone Super 15

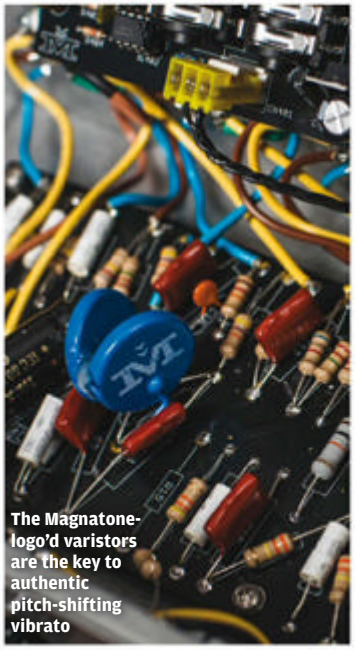
Magnatones have been used by everyone from Buddy Holly to Slash and damn near every tasty and rootsy player in-between, but the Magnatone sound remains synonymous with the guitar hero's guitar hero, Lonnie Mack. It's not about sparkling cleans, or even an identifiable overdrive characteristic – the defining element for Mack and Magnatone is 'FM vibrato'.

Developed with input from Billy Gibbons and launched as part of the brand's 2013 revival, the Super 15 has a 'British inspired' amplifier circuit running two EL84 power valves and a GZ34 rectifier, combined with Magnatone's varistor vibrato/tremolo circuit. Inside the plywood cabinet, there's a 12-inch Warehouse ET90 speaker, with carbon film resistors and a mixture of Sprague and Mallory 150 capacitors loaded on a printed circuit board.

The controls are restricted to gain, tone and master, along with speed and intensity, with an expression pedal that also controls speed. In case you're concerned, the FM/AM switch doesn't determine the type of unwanted radio interference the amp picks up. It's a frequency/amplitude modulation switch to select tremolo or vibrato.

Overall, the finish quality is presentable rather than exceptional, but the mid-century modernism

The Super 15's FM/AM switch selects tremolo and vibrato


The Magnatone-logo'd varistors are the key to authentic pitch-shifting vibrato

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impresses. The grille cloth wouldn't look out of place covering a *Mad Men* sofa and they've even used mini bulbs to backlight the Magnatone lettering.

In use

The 15-inch speaker and the Vox-inspired circuitry define the overall tone. It's a big-sounding speaker that can fill a room with warm, syrupy tones, but it doesn't have that much high-frequency sparkle.

Although not an especially versatile amp, the Super 15 is capable of some very pleasing clean and overdriven tones, but they're all variations on a theme rather than a smörgåsbord of sounds, and things can get a tad ragged when the amp is pushed to its limits.

The limited tone-shaping capability means you need to be bold with the treble roll-off. With humbuckers, I managed to dial in some woofy ZZ Top-style grind by maxing out the gain and master and turning the tone fully down. At more sedate settings, semi-hollow guitars sounded woody and deep, and the only issue was keeping low-frequency feedback in check.

The Super 15 is all about the vibrato, and to a lesser extent the tremolo. The beautiful vibrato has a swirly and slightly phasey quality that falls somewhere between a rudimentary chorus (without sounding dated) and a Leslie speaker (without the swoosh).

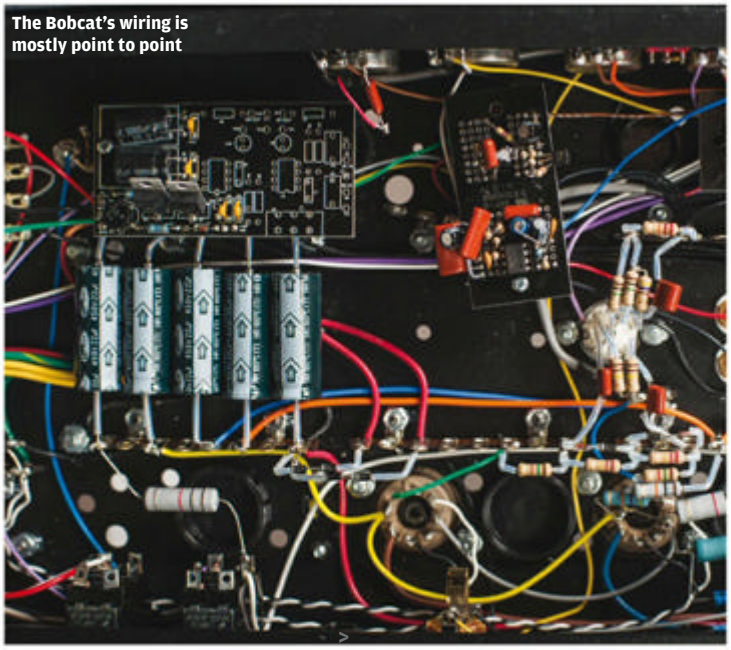
The tremolo is so deep it feels like a heart massage, and the player-friendly rise and fall characteristics permit heavy settings without excessive choppiness. Rocked fully back, the expression pedal sets the speed to zero, which is the same as turning the effects off. I had fun swelling modulation into fading chords and adding just the right amount of burble to picked arpeggios.

As 15-watt amps go, the Super 15 is fairly loud and produces a big, room-filling sound. With onboard spring reverb, it would have been *Twin Peaks* in a box. It undoubtedly nails the Lonnie Mack vibrato, but so do affordable pedals such as the Bigfoot FX Magnavibe. That said, you can use a pedal in front of any amp, but you won't get foot control. The tone is certainly pleasing, but without the effects, edgier players may find it slightly uninspiring.

Bad Cat Bobcat 20R

Don't let the two 6V6 power tubes and the open back 1x12 combo cabinet mislead you into thinking this is some 5E3 wannabe. Bad Cat has opted for a large early-50s style dual triode preamp tube, called a 6SL7. There is one

We'll never get tired of light-up amp logos


The Bobcat's wiring is mostly point to point

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Magnatone Super 15

Vox AC15 Hand Wired £1,143
Although not exactly a reissue, this amp is hand-wired on turret board and features an EZ81 rectifier valve, as well as a pair of EL84s and three ESS83s. You also get top boost and normal channels, but no tremolo or vibrato.

Bigfoot FX Magnavibe $210
You won't find many other amps with valve vibrato, but the Magnavibe is regarded as being as close as anybody has come to capturing the Magnatone vibrato in a stompbox. The circuit is fully discrete and uses a photo resistor to modulate the signal.

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The main controls are gain, tone, reverb and master volume, which should be self-explanatory. A boost switch bypasses the tone control and works in conjunction with a rotary boost control. This feature is also footswitchable. A second panel switch engages the rip circuit for yet more gain and there's a passive series effects loop.

The 12-inch Celestion speaker is described as 'Bad Cat proprietary', although a small label reads 'Vintage 30'. With a plywood cabinet and chunky transformers, the 20R weighs 40lbs.

In use

It takes a while to get used to the Bobcat's way of doing things because overdrive, too, and the response is softer and more compressed.

If the tone is too thick and muddy, there are two options. If you turn up the master volume, the sound becomes more defined as fizzy harmonic overtones join the fray. Alternatively, you can turn the boost control down and compensate by increasing the gain setting. This overcomes the boxiness and improves the clarity of the sound by de-emphasising the midrange.

The onboard reverb sounds huge and bright, but the reverb control is a bit on/off. Despite producing some very decent and chimey clean tones, the Bobcat 20R's real forte is punchy, aggressive overdrive and crunchy distortion. It's

Despite producing some decent clean tones, the Bobcat 20R's forte is punchy overdrive and crunchy distortion

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Bad Cat Bobcat 20R

Two Rock Studio Pro 22 Combo £1,749 Inspired by the designs of a certain Californian amp builder, this 22-watt combo is driven by two 6V6s and has a pull bright control, active buffered effects loop, spring reverb with send and return controls and a pickup loading control with five settings.

Budda Series II Superdrive V20 £1,699 This two-channel, 20-watt valve combo has 6V6 power valves and a 5U4 rectifier. There's a handwired power section, PCB preamp, effects loop, slave output and extension speaker out.

Swart Space Tone 45 Head

Tone King Sky King £2,449 This two-channel 35-watt hand-wired valve combo has a 12-inch Celestion G12M65 Creamback speaker, spring reverb, tremolo and an Ironman attenuator. Pentode mode spans 50s Fender to early Marshall. Ultralinear mode opens up another world of dynamic response.

Lazy J 40 £2,099 The looks are tweed-y but this two-channel 40-watt combo comes with optional valve-driven reverb and bias tremolo modules, a sensitivity control and tweed/'blackface' switching. It's hand built to order in the UK, too.

12AX7 but it's used for phase inversion, and solid-state circuitry drives the spring reverb.

On Bad Cat's website, you can find two different power ratings – 15 and 20 watts. A quick peek inside led me to conclude the Bobcat 20R is actually a 15-watt cathode biased amp and the lower figure is correct.

The chassis is obviously used for several different Bad Cat models and plastic plugs blank off non-required holes. The insides may look a bit chaotic, but it's actually quite neat for an amp that is mostly wired point to point. Other nice touches include an illuminated display and gold-plated connections for the reverb.

this is a bright, loud and belligerent little critter that is capable of getting a bit edgy if you let it.

Towards the upper limits of the master volume, the sound gets noticeably brighter. About three o'clock seems about right if you want the tone control to remain effective. The rip switch boosts the front end for more gain and crunch, but you can achieve the same result by simply increasing the volume, and you may find the tone is a little sweeter.

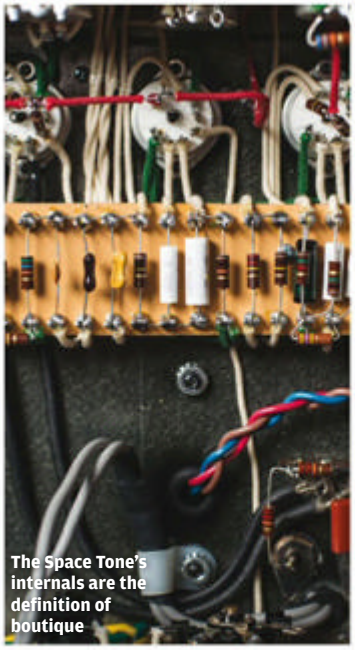
Boost has a far more noticeable effect on the sound and dynamic response. I noticed a loss of treble, along with a thicker and boxier midrange honk. There's a lot more

not exactly subtle, but it's fun. Many people associate the term 'boutique' with smooth, refined tone based on vintage designs and well-proven circuitry; the Bobcat 20R takes some of those elements as a starting point, and then veers off on a rockier road. Its naturally toppy and punchy character may be a tad full-on for single coils, but rockers with humbuckers will enjoy the crunch, sustain and tightly controlled bass.

Swart Space Tone 45

The looks and specs epitomise the notion of a 'boutique' amp to such a degree that the Swart feels almost like a parody of the genre. We're talking

The Swart's lift-off lid reveals its valves


The Space Tone's internals are the definition of boutique

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carbon composite resistors and Mallory signal capacitors hand-wired onto turret board with star grounding, cloth-covered wire and zero negative feedback.

This valve-rectified 45-watt Class AB amplifier has reverb and tremolo and all the valve heaters are referenced to ground. Power valve bias test points are mounted on the back panel and Swart provides instructions for setting the bias.

Incorporating 1950s comic book sci-fi motifs and a control layout like something from a mad scientist's laboratory, this is amp design as art. Black tweed with gold piping adorns the pine cabinet, but the most imaginative feature is the head's lift-off lid, which comes away to reveal the valves and transformers.

Besides looking fantastic, the idea is to make valve swapping easier. It would probably be OK to experiment with different preamp triodes because they're all 12AX7s, but Swart recommended trying a 5Y3 instead of the GZ34 rectifier.

This amp represents a departure from Swart's small and simple formula. It's the most powerful amp the manufacturer currently offers and the first to have treble and bass controls, and fixed bias. We tested it with a matching Swart 2x12 cabinet loaded with Celestion Creambacks.

In use

In addition to the tone controls, there's volume and master, plus speed and depth for the tremolo, space for the reverb and a three-way treble voicing switch. This may appear simple, but things are unusually interactive.

Put simply, the volume and master settings determine the treble content, as well as preamp and poweramp levels. With the master fully up and the volume around halfway, you get a clean and transparent tone that's also fairly bright. Even players who appreciate bright and spanky tones may feel inclined to roll the treble right back and select the darkest setting on the voicing switch.

Everything changes as you reduce the master and increase the volume, with the mids filling out and the treble rolling off dramatically. Together, the treble control and voicing switch enable you to set the upper-frequency response with minute precision.

In essence, the Space Tone 45 sounds like medium-power tweed with a world-class tremolo, 'blackface'-style highs and 5E3-type touch dynamics. The reverb has a more distant character, sounding fairly dark and sitting behind the dry signal. Interestingly, like the Bad Cat, you can turn the volume right down and still hear a fully wet reverb signal, which suggests the reverb works on a side chain. Even so, it's far removed from the cavernous drip of a Twin, or indeed the 'verb onboard other models in the Swart catalogue. You can combine chewy, touch-sensitive overdrive with chiming highs, or roll back the top for barking, bluesy honk. I couldn't decide whether I preferred the incandescent shimmer of the GZ34 or the spongier, grungier and tweedier delights of the 5Y3, but either way the ST45 seems to bring out the best from every guitar, and it's a valve amp tweaker's delight.

The Space Tone 45 is resolutely rootsy in an all-American sort of way. Although the overdrive can really bark, it's by no means a high-gain amp and pedal assistance is required for creamy, single-note sustain. Reverb obsessives may be underwhelmed, but for general playing duties it renders pedals superfluous, and I'm chalking the Space Control 45 up as one of the finest amps I have played.

KEY FEATURES

Magnatone Super 15

- **DESCRIPTION** 15-watt, single-channel valve combo with onboard vibrato and tremolo and a 12-inch Warehouse speaker. Made in the USA
- **PRICE** £2,399
- **CONTROLS** Gain, tone, volume, speed, depth, FM/AM switch
- **REAR PANEL CONNECTIONS** 1x extension speaker out with selectable 16/8-ohm impedance, line out, footswitch, expression pedal
- **VALVES** 3x 12AX7, 1x 12AU7, 2x EL34 & GZ34 rectifier
- **DIMENSIONS** 24X20X10.5"
- **WEIGHT** 45lbs
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350815 **www.coda-music.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Distinctive looks
+ Big, warm tone
+ Outstanding vibrato and tremolo

– Slightly lacking in airy treble
– Fairly restricted range of gain and tonal variety

The Super 15 delivers big clean and medium drive tones, with a really good tremolo and an iconic vibrato. For tonal shading, you'll need pedals, but it does take them well

7/10

KEY FEATURES

Bad Cat Bobcat 20R

- **DESCRIPTION** 15-watt, single-channel valve combo with spring reverb, 12-inch Bad Cat Celestion (Vintage 30). Made in USA
- **PRICE** £1,149
- **CONTROLS** Gain, tone, reverb, master, rip switch, boost switch
- **REAR PANEL CONNECTIONS** Footswitch for boost, effects send and return
- **VALVES** 6SL7, 12AX7, 2x 6V6
- **DIMENSIONS** 20.5x10.5x17.5"
- **WEIGHT** 41lbs
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350815 **www.coda-music.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Wide range of clean to crunchy tones
+ Huge-sounding reverb
+ Onboard effects loop

– Tone may be too edgy and aggressive for some
– Not especially touch sensitive

The most compact and affordable amp of our trio, the Bobcat is a punchy little feline that's best suited to humbuckers

7/10

KEY FEATURES

Swart Space Tone 45 Head

- **DESCRIPTION** 45-watt, single-channel Class AB head with onboard tremolo and spring reverb. Made in USA
- **PRICE** £1,999 (ST 212 cabinet loaded with 2x Celestion Creamback speakers £799)
- **CONTROLS** Volume, bass, treble, space, speed, depth & master
- **REAR PANEL CONNECTIONS** 2x speaker outputs with selectable 4/8-ohm impedance, tremolo/reverb footswitch
- **VALVES** 12DW7 (reverb), 3x 12AX7, 2x 6L6 and GZ34 rectifier
- **DIMENSIONS** 19x9.5x11"
- **WEIGHT** 28lbs
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350 815 **www.coda-music.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Stunning looks and build quality
+ Versatile tones and tweed-y touch response
+ A tweaker's delight: easy biasing and valve swaps

– Doesn't do really heavy overdrive
– Reverb slightly disappointing

The reverb is only OK, and you'll need a pedal for solo sustain, but in every other respect this is a thing of beauty in looks and sounds

9/10

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SSDPS15

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Orange Rockerverb 100 MkIII

This 100-watt stack recalls an era of roadies and huge flares, but it's not just about the overdrive sound, as **HUW PRICE** discovers...

The 100 MkIII sits at the top of the power structure in the third incarnation of Orange's Rockerverb series. Although changes have been made for the MkIIIs, some have brought the new amps closer to the earliest versions. For instance, the clean channel has only treble and bass controls, and the design has remained true to the original gain structure for the dirty channel.

These changes have been made in response to several years of customer feedback. Particular attention has been paid to re-voicing the clean channel for more clean headroom and extended treble response. The valve-driven spring reverb has been tweaked, too, with a level control that allows more precise adjustment, and brighter tails to keep them distinct from the dry signal.

Orange has also beefed up the power supply, and the multi-connectors have been replaced by hand-soldered wiring. Multi-turn bias adjusters are provided for each power valve tube, which makes re-biasing straightforward for any qualified tech. Rebiasing also allows you to replace the stock EL34 tubes with 6L6s, or you can use two of each.

Besides the integrated attenuator, there are two ways to adjust the output power. As they operate independently, there are four possible settings. Method one is a full/half-power switch on the front panel that drops the plate voltage of the power valves by 100v. The power valves draw more current, bringing the operation closer to Class A.

Method two utilises a switch on the back that deselects two power valves and adjusts output impedance so the three speaker outputs remain the same. The power switch gives you 100-watt and 70-watt, or 50-watt and 30-watt settings, depending on how many power valves are active. Beneath the attenuator and reverb controls is a planet symbol to indicate that they act 'globally' on both channels. Orange has taken a distinctive approach to attenuation in order to maintain the interactive relationship between the power valves, transformer and speakers. Put simply, the attenuator comes after the preamp and determines the clipping point of the power valves.

In use

The head was supplied with a closed-back cabinet containing four Celestion Vintage 30 12-inch speakers. With closed-back cabs, the sound tends to differ depending on your proximity to the speakers, and you really need to stand about 10 feet away to get a clear sense of what's going on.

Particular attention has been paid to re-voicing the clean channel for more headroom and extended treble response

I was interested in comparing the basic voicing of the two channels, so I centred all the tone controls, put the clean channel at its breakup point then maxed out the dirty channel's volume and adjusted its gain for an equivalent level. >

The lack of text on the control panel is initially confusing, but you get used to it

KEY FEATURES

Orange Rockerverb 100 MkIII

- **DESCRIPTION** 100/70/50/30-watt 2-channel valve head with attenuator, spring reverb, 2x8 and 1x16 ohm outputs and tube buffered effects loop. Made in England
- **PRICE** £1,499 (cabinet £739)
- **VALVES** 4x ECC83, 2x ECC81, 4x EL34
- **CONTROLS** Clean channel: volume, bass, treble. Dirty channel: gain, bass, mid, treble. Global: reverb, attenuator, clean/dirty selector, full/standby/half-power switch, 2/4 power valve switch
- **DIMENSIONS** 55x27x28cm
- **WEIGHT** 24.75Kg/54.5lbs
- **CONTACT** Orange Amps 0208 905 2828 www.orange-amps.com

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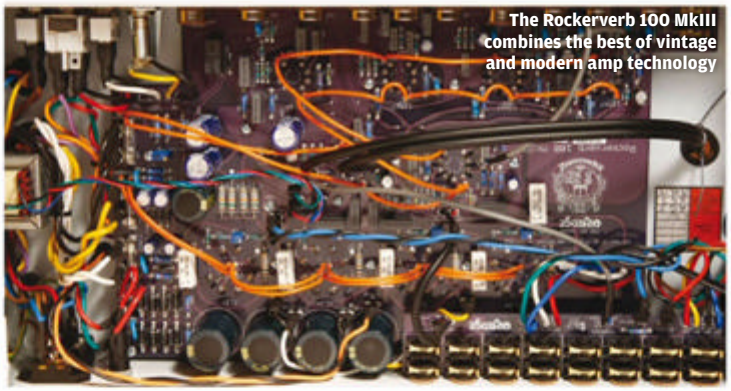
The supplied EL34s can be swapped out for 6L6s


The Rockerverb 100 MkIII combines the best of vintage and modern amp technology

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **Blackstar Series One S1-104 £1,149** is a four-channel, all-valve 100-watt head with an EL34-driven power amp and DPR system. ISF (Infinite Shape Feature) control changes the tone from USA to classic UK. The **Marshall JCM800 2203 £1,499** is an iconic design and the current reissue has just one master volume and no reverb or effects. Four EL34s produce 100 watts, and there's an effects loop with true bypass. **Mesa/Boogie**'s **Dual Rectifier Solo Head Classic Version £1,999** has a Multi-Watt channel-assignable power amp that allows you to assign either two or all six power tubes to each channel for 50 or 150 watts of Class A/B power.

The clean channel sounds like a big old Fender amp, but beefier. It has an uncompressed and dynamic quality with plenty of clarity, and a slightly scooped midrange accompanies the bumped-up bass and treble. The dirty channel sounds more compressed, thicker in the middle, lighter in the bass and a tad more aggressive in the upper mids.

With single coils, the clean channel stays clean until the volume passes halfway, when a gently compressed overdrive eases in. This channel is no afterthought. The tone controls are so powerful you can dial in a huge range of sounds with pretty much any guitar. Cranked up, it can dish out a creamy, harmonically loaded, old-school rock tone, and you can control the level with the unusually transparent attenuator.

The dirty channel is similarly versatile. Up to the halfway point, the gain control increases overdrive gradually. Around one o'clock, the overdrive begins morphing into distortion and by three o'clock the sound can be described as high-gain.

You can negate any fizziness by cranking up the volume and allowing the power tubes to thicken and round out the tone. Naturally, things can get loud, but the attenuator can handle that. Powerchords crunch and punch, and the Rockerverb 100 can sustain single notes almost indefinitely, even before you reach high-gain mode.

The term 'beefed-up power supply' may ring alarm bells for incorrigible tweed tone enthusiasts, but any concerns are misplaced. The 100 MkIII is not one of those high-power amps with stiff and spiky transients. Instead, you just get well-controlled lows with properly defined pick attack.

Half power

The sonic characteristics of both channels are retained in half-power mode, impacting on the sound only as its pushed into overdrive. Half power softens the treble and slows the transient response of the clean channel subtly, and while the dirty channel loses a bit of slam, the compression becomes more responsive to playing touch.

I wouldn't consider power switching in terms of level control. It's more about altering touch dynamics and texture, and expanding on the 100 MkIII's versatility. Halving the output power by switching off two power valves does not produce a dramatic volume drop. Instead, you lose a bit of upper-harmonic sheen and bite, but it increases the touchy-feely relationship between the amp and speakers.

Level control reverts to the attenuator, which can ease things from a window-rattling 100 watts to silence. You can even disengage the attenuator with a footswitch, effectively turning it into a boost feature for both channels.

While I enjoyed the tone of the reverb on the clean channel, I wouldn't use it with high gain. Although the reverb is footswitchable, its status doesn't change when you switch channels, and the 100 MkIII might benefit from a dirty channel defeat switch. Generic footswitches can be used for the reverb, attenuator and channel hopping, but Orange should perhaps supply one given the cost of the amp.

The Rockerverb 100 MkIII is a fire-breathing 100-watt rock and metal head, but it does a good impression of a spongy mid-powered boutique amp. With a touch of breathy spring reverb, the clean channel is capable of bluesy, Fender-like cleans and even Vox-y chime. What's more, it can do all of the above at any volume, with no extraneous noise. Plus, if you don't like the colour, it comes in black, too.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Fine looks and build quality
+ Extremely versatile
+ Engaging touch response
+ Very low noise for a 100W amp

– 1/2-button footswitches cost extra (£27.99/£37.49)
– Reverb is global, not channel selectable

This 100-watt head is also a 70-, 50- and 30-watt amp. Throw in the built-in attenuator and, contrary to appearances, it's pretty much an amp for all occasions.

8/10

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Blackstar ID:Core BEAM

Blackstar's latest is a 20-watt practice combo and wireless hi-fi speaker in one box. **RICHARD PURVIS** strums along to thin air...

Bluetooth speakers – thousands of 'em! Now that most people seem to be listening to music on their smartphones, the era of the iPod – and with it the iPod dock – is under threat. Speaker systems with Bluetooth wireless tech can give a room-filling voice to your phone, tablet or PC with no cables involved, and if you don't have at least one, your neighbours are talking about you. But why does this concern Blackstar? Well, the company proved with the other ID:Core models that it can make a small guitar amp with full-frequency music speakers work, so joining the Bluetooth revolution is the next natural step.

The BEAM is similar in most ways to the rest of the ID:Core range: it's a 20-watt desktop combo with 12 amp voices, plus a decent palette of digital effects; it has a stereo pair of three-inch speakers, plus a headphone socket that doubles as a speaker-emulated recording output; and there is a line input for piping in music from an external device, but this time you really shouldn't need it. If the source of your music is in the same room as the amp, and they both have Bluetooth engaged, they should be able to sniff each other out like the last two unmarried penguins in the zoo. The only bit of conventional connectivity you need to worry about is plugging your jack lead into the guitar input.

In use

The ID:Core BEAM is little bigger than the average bedside radio, but one surprising omission is any kind of handle or strap – you might struggle to move it around with one hand. Find it a comfy spot on a sideboard, though, and it'll soon make itself at home in your hi-tech life. As a guitar amp, it's simpler than the busy control panel might suggest. Press 'manual' to free yourself from the presets and all you need to do is make sure the gain and volume are both somewhere close to halfway, then turn the voice control to select from the six basic tones – from ultra-clean to heavily overdriven. All are high on clarity, as you'd expect from Blackstar, and the volume levels on offer are more than enough for the average bedroom.

Push the voice knob and you engage the six alternative voices: two for acoustic guitars, two more to simulate an acoustic with an electric, and two for bass. There are no standard EQ controls, just Blackstar's ISF (Infinite Shape Feature), which adjusts the midrange voicing on a broadly British/American axis. This is a real asset, although with brighter guitars it would be handy to have the option of some straight treble attenuation, too. The effects are great fun, and the amp's stereo capabilities have been put to good use with the spookily spacious reverbs.

We tried the Bluetooth with a number of devices, from Android phones to Macs. Initially, more than one of them struggled to lock in on the Blackstar; but once they did, we had a reliable supply of backing music to widdle along with. Then we stopped playing and carried on listening – because you have to rest your fingers sometimes, and this thing makes a fine ghetto blaster.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE... If you're not fussed about the Bluetooth, the **Blackstar ID:Core Stereo 40** offers double the wattage through six-inch speakers for **£159**. Or there's the **Yamaha THR10X £299**, a digital modelling amp with an MP3 input and three-inch hi-fi speakers.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Clear and punchy guitar tones
+ Zany but usable stereo effects
+ Wireless stereo hi-fi from your phone

– Can be hissy at low volume levels
– Bluetooth is a little flaky with some devices
– A handle would have been nice

This is a great idea well executed, and should be standard issue for all young guitarists heading off to student digs in the autumn

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Blackstar ID:Core BEAM

- **DESCRIPTION** 20-watt 2x3" solid-state combo and stereo Bluetooth speaker. Made in China
- **PRICE** £239
- **CONTROL PANEL** Guitar input, line input, headphones/DI out; 12-way voice selector, gain, volume, EQ (ISF) controls, manual/preset selector; modulation, delay and reverb on/edit/off buttons, effect type/depth and level controls, tap tempo; USB socket for deep editing and sharing of patches, Bluetooth discoverable/scanning/off button
- **DIMENSIONS** 29x20x17cm
- **WEIGHT** 3.9kg/8.6lbs
- **CONTACT** Blackstar Amplification, 01604 817817 **www.blackstaramps.com**

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J Rockett Audio Designs pedals

'Made by musicians, for musicians' may be a cliché, but it sums up the J Rockett ethos. **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** takes a listen...

Founded a decade ago by Colorado's Chris Van Tassel and Jay Rockett, JRAD was set up to address the needs of Van Tassel and Rockett themselves – and the numerous session guitarists they'd crossed paths with. The six pedals on test represent a cross-section of the company's catalogue, which is split into three sections. From the Pro Series comes the Alien Echo delay. Representing the Signature series are a range of overdrives designed in conjunction with sessioneers Tim Pierce and Guthrie Trapp plus jazz-fusion legend Allan Holdsworth, and a Josh Smith signature tremolo. From the Tour Series, we have JRAD's take on the Klon Centaur – the Archer.

KEY FEATURES

Tim Pierce Overdrive/Boost

- **PRICE** £209
- **ORIGIN** USA
- **CONTROLS** Tone, bass, power amp, drive, level. Overdrive on/off, power amp on/off
- **FEATURES** True bypass switching. Powered by 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) or 9V battery
- **DIMENSIONS** 120mm (w) x 75mm (d) x 42mm (h)
- **CONTACT** Zoom UK Distribution 08432 080 999 **www.rockettpedals.com**

Albuquerque-born session guitarist Tim Pierce has worked with some of the biggest names in the music business, including Michael Jackson, Madonna and Tina Turner. His signature Rockett pedal chases the tone of one of his favourite amps, the Naylor Super-Drive 60, and is effectively two pedals in one that can be used independently or cascaded together; the power amp boost is designed to ape the big 5881 bottles in the SD60's power stage.

In use

The OD side of the pedal is a fat, mid-rich drive with gain levels comparable to a classic distortion stompbox in its upper reaches. Wind things back a bit and there's a nice, tweedy middleground that can do all manner of retro rock rhythm voices including, with the tone dialled to taste, a satisfying Keef impression, and with a suitably bright bridge pickup, *Southern Man*-era Neil Young. Throw in that power amp boost and this is a versatile unit.

Guitar VERDICT

+ Hugely versatile
+ Excellent range of overdrive sounds
+ Robust build quality

– Pro-level pricing

£209 initially seems like a lot of money for an overdrive, but this do-it-all dirtbox could easily replace two existing pedals on your 'board and is built to last.

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Archer Overdrive/Boost

- **PRICE** £149
- **ORIGIN** USA
- **CONTROLS** Output, gain, treble
- **FEATURES** Buffered bypass switching. Powered by 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) or 9V battery
- **DIMENSIONS** 59mm (w) x 101mm (d) x 31mm (h)
- **CONTACT** Zoom UK Distribution 08432 080 999 **www.rockettpedals.com**

Guitar AWARD CHOICE 9/10

JRAD helped Klon mastermind Bill Finnegan produce the first 1,500 KTR pedals and though their relationship didn't last, the Archer is the affordable 'son of Centaur' many wish Finnegan had made. An original design it isn't, but then the Archer costs a tenth of the going rate for the 'real thing'. The enclosure is tough and compact, with top-mounted connections minimising its footprint. Unlike the Centaur, there's no dual-gang gain control, but the 18V charge pump, buffered circuit and germanium diodes are present, sans black goop.

In use

Does the Archer nail the Centaur tone? In an A/B test it's close, with the Archer possessing a slightly grittier midrange and the Klon a hair more bite. Setting the output high and rolling off the gain yields a stunning, high-headroom clean boost that's widescreen, dynamic and addictive. Wind up the gain for throaty overdrive, greasy rhythm and harmonically-rich lead tones.

Guitar VERDICT

+ Near-as-dammit Klon tones
+ Organic, amp-like boost and gritty drive
+ Pedalboard-friendly enclosure

– You'll want to buy two

The Archer excels in its natural habitat as a boost or overdrive in front of a loud valve amp and doesn't cost as much as a secondhand car. Buy one, switch it on and grin.

9/10

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Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

KEY FEATURES

Guthrie Trapp Overdrive

- **PRICE** £189
- **ORIGIN** USA
- **CONTROLS** Level, accent, gain
- **FEATURES** True bypass switching. Powered by 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) or 9V battery
- **DIMENSIONS** 75mm (w) x 120mm (d) x 42mm (h)
- **CONTACT** Zoom UK Distribution 08432 080 999 **www.rockettpedals.com**

Guthrie Trapp is an in-demand name on the Nashville scene as both a session musician and a solo artist who has worked with the likes of Garth Brooks, Dolly Parton, Alison Krauss and many other stars. Designed to work with a wide variety of amplifiers, Trapp's chunky signature OD is a simple yet highly versatile proposition based on JRAD's now-discontinued Chicken Soup pedal, itself modelled after the Nobels ODR-1 – a Nashville favourite.

In use

Compared to the Archer, the Trapp OD sits much closer to the Tube Screamer camp, with more compression and tonnes of sustain. It's a little noisier, too, but certainly not unacceptably so. With the accent set around noon and the gain high, the Trapp delivers a flattering, high-quality voice for fluid lead lines. Dialling in more of a clean boost setting, it's less transparent than the Archer, but it still does a great job of giving your signal chain a kick in the tail.

Guitar VERDICT

+ Liquid sustain that's great for lead
+ Flattering natural compression
+ Effective boost

– Feels a little pricey for a TS-style drive
– Not exactly space-saving either

A pro-quality overdrive that's a little more forgiving than the Archer and complements Fender-style single coils nicely.

7/10

KEY FEATURES

Josh Smith Dual Trem

- **PRICE** £209
- **ORIGIN** USA
- **CONTROLS** 2x rate, 2x depth, boost. L/R footswitch toggles between left- and right-hand controls
- **FEATURES** True bypass switching. Powered by 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) or 9V battery
- **DIMENSIONS** 120mm (w) x 75mm (d) x 42mm (h)
- **CONTACT** Zoom UK Distribution 08432 080 999 **www.rockettpedals.com**

The Josh Smith Dual Trem is a collaboration between US blues guitarist Smith, Rockett pedals and another stateside boutique pedal maker, Tim Jauernig. Designed with the bewitching pulse of early Fender amp tremolo in mind, the clever feature is the way the L/R footswitch can be used to toggle between separate settings governed by the left- and right-hand controls. There's also a level boost to stop you disappearing in the mix.

In use

The Dual Trem was a little noisy and temperamental with our 9V PSU, but much better-behaved with an alternative, seemingly identical supply. This hiccup can be excused, as there's a spellbinding, vintage amp-like depth here that's rarely available from a stompbox tremolo. The ability to switch between two different speeds is eminently useful, as is the option to set both sides to the same speed with two distinct depths and vary the intensity.

Guitar VERDICT

+ Bewitching, amp-like vintage tones
+ Two foot-switchable sounds
+ Level boost

– Initially a little temperamental with a PSU
– Priced for diehard tremolo fans only

If you're serious about adding an authentic-sounding, vintage-style tremolo to your rig that's highly practical, check this out.

8/10

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KEY FEATURES

Alien Echo

- **PRICE** £229
- **ORIGIN** USA
- **CONTROLS** Delay time, warble, mix, repeats, tone. Warble on/off, effect on/off
- **FEATURES** True bypass switching. Powered by 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) or 9V battery
- **DIMENSIONS** 120mm (w) x 75mm (d) x 42mm (h)
- **CONTACT** Zoom UK Distribution 08432 080 999 **www.rockettpedals.com**

There is no shortage of delay pedals designed to recreate the sounds of analogue stompboxes and vintage tape echos. Combining an analogue dry signal with digital processing, JRAD's two-button Alien Echo covers plenty of ground, from vintage-style slapback echo to warped soundscapes, courtesy of the warble control, which twists and detunes the repeats in the manner of worn-out tape.

In use

Versatile and highly musical, with conservative settings, the Alien Echo delivers a retro slapback, blossoming into Eric Johnson-style washes and post-rock trails as you wind up the delay time and repeats. With the warble footswitch, you can create detuned rhythmic effects and switch them in and out in time with a backing track, or leave it engaged for a grainy tape echo vibe. The tone control is useful, but be wary: the more treble you introduce, the more hiss you get.

Guitar VERDICT

+ Easy to manipulate controls on the fly
+ Versatile voices from practical to out-there
+ Warble switch can be used creatively

– Can get hissy using bright tone settings
– Very hot competition from other brands

It isn't cheap, but the Alien Echo has a convincing array of sounds and a well thought-out enclosure for easy tweaking.

7/10

KEY FEATURES

Allan Holdsworth Overdrive/Boost

- **PRICE** £209
- **ORIGIN** USA
- **CONTROLS** Drive: gain, volume, bass, treble. Boost: boost level, L/H toggle, F/C/T toggle
- **FEATURES** True bypass switching. Powered by 9V DC adaptor (not supplied) or 9V battery
- **DIMENSIONS** 120mm (w) x 75mm (d) x 42mm (h)
- **CONTACT** Zoom UK Distribution 08432 080 999 **www.rockettpedals.com**

Legendary jazz-fusion guitarist Allan Holdsworth needs little introduction, and this signature pedal was designed with flexibility in mind. It can be used as two discrete units or cascaded for more fluid tones. On the drive side, you get volume, gain, bass and treble controls. The boost functions – which affect only the drive side if both footswitches are engaged – comprise a rotary boost level and two toggle switches. The left-hand switch emphasises highs or lows, while the right-hand toggle flips between full, clean and treble boost.

In use

The controls are highly interactive and require experimentation. It's no high-gain animal; a combination of both sides heats up proceedings, but the emphasis is on articulate transparency and tone shaping. There's a smoothness that suits modern fusion when a suitable amp sound or drive pedals are used as the foundation – don't expect Allan Holdsworth in a box.

Guitar VERDICT

+ Smooth range of boost voicings
+ Works well with a driven amp
+ A tweaker's paradise

– Like jazz-fusion, there's a learning curve
– A little light on gain without assistance

One for the tweakers and players who like to stack overdrives, this is a thinking player's boost, not a standalone dirtbox.

7/10

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Catalinbread Topanga & Belle Epoch

Catalinbread attempts to fit a Fender spring reverb and an Echoplex tape echo into stompboxes. **HUW PRICE** feels the ambience...

It speaks volumes about electric guitar culture that cutting-edge DSP technology is largely focused on recreating the sounds of decades-old and often obsolete equipment. Interestingly, there has been a split, too. Digital modeling amps have come to be regarded as entry-level products, while DSP-driven effects receive widespread approval from discerning musicians and audio professionals.

Catalinbread is prominent amongst a new breed of pedal manufacturers that combine DSP with an analogue aesthetic. Most DSP pedals are generic tape delay or reverb emulators, but Catalinbread stands out by concentrating on the replication of specific audio classics.

The digital side is confined to tasks it performs best, and Catalinbread replicates discrete analogue circuitry where appropriate. The Topanga and Belle Epoch typify Catalinbread's approach, so let's see what they're all about.

Topanga Spring Reverb

Named after the Californian canyon home of Neil Young and Charles Manson, the Topanga is a reverb pedal inspired by Fender's standalone 6G15 spring reverb.

Looking like an amp head, the 6G15 contained three valves and a spring pan. Produced from 1961, it came to be regarded as *the* reverb for surf and spaghetti, and unlike onboard amp reverbs, the 6G15 was placed in front of the amplifier. Overdriving an amp meant distorting the reverb signal, too.

The 6G15 had three controls – dwell, mix and tone. Dwell controlled the level of the guitar signal reaching the springs and tone rolled off the treble frequencies. Finally, the balance of the dry and reverb signals was set using the mix control.

Catalinbread has opted for an identical arrangement, with an additional volume control and a number of other tweaks. The mix control range is altered to allow 100 per cent wet signal to pass, and a discrete preamp has been added. Cranking up the volume produces a clean boost to drive your amp harder.

Sounds

An internal switch enables users to select true bypass or a buffered mode that keeps the onboard preamp and volume control active – even when the Topanga is switched off. I placed the Topanga in a switchable loop, set the volume for unity gain and discovered that the preamp very subtly enhanced the dry tone's clarity.

You can set the Topanga for a subtle halo of dark reverb or lashings of splash, but it always sounds like a spring reverb

You can set the Topanga for a subtle halo of dark reverb or lashings of splash, but it always sounds like a spring reverb and nothing else. Dwell pushes the effect into a spitty wash that sounds its surfiest with the tone set high. This may be desirable for die-hard reverb fanatics only, but >

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LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Topanga

The **Boss FRV-1 £99** is a collaborative effort from Fender and Roland, designed to recreate the tone and response of a 1963 Fender Spring Reverb. It comes with the original compliment of controls: mixer, tone and dwell. If real springs are a must, try the **VanAmps Sole-Mate $285**. This solid-state analogue reverb contains an MOD three-spring reverb tank. Measuring 10X6X2 inches, the controls include output level, dwell and true bypass switching. A second footswitch can be used for tremolo on/off or other duties. The **Subdecay Super Spring Theory £139** is a DSP-driven spring tank reverb with room reverb mode, all-analogue signal path, external trails switch, controls for reverb and dry signals, and JFET amplifiers for reverb send and recovery.

Belle Epoch

The **Skreddy Echo £229** is a digital delay with analogue filtering and limiting, an all-analogue dry signal path, high headroom and a modulation section. Probably the most versatile tape echo simulator is the **Strymon El Capistan £249**. It has fixed, single and multi-head settings, tape crinkle, wow and flutter, tape age, bias setting, 3dB boost/cut, reverb, low-end contour and sound-on-sound. The **T-Rex Replicator £TBC** is set for release later this year. Precise details are unavailable, but it's a multi-head tape delay with a replaceable tape cartridge and all-analogue circuitry.

with single coils it delivers quintessential surf tone.

The dwell and volume controls interact. Although 'dwell' implies decay length, it also adds volume and grittiness. For sweeter and smoother reverb tones, you can set dwell lower, turn mix higher, then compensate for lower level by turning up vol.

Catalinbread suggests that the only pedals you should place in front of the Topanga are fuzzboxes. A Fuzzrite clone seemed an appropriate choice, and with the dwell and mix set to 3 o'clock the results were so startling I expected a mysterious horseman to appear over the horizon. Returning to clean tones, I learned that placing modulation pedals after the Topanga is a dreamy combination.

The Topanga's range of reverb tones is so wide there are some I would probably never use and others I might find it hard to live without

The Topanga's range of reverb tones is so wide there are some I would probably never use and others I might find it hard to live without. But they all sound springy and completely unlike studio-style reverb effects. If you love spring reverb and your amp doesn't already have one, consider the Topanga a problem solved.

Belle Epoch

Many of the well-documented 'technical deficiencies' of tape echoes are the things we have learned to love about them. These complex variables come together, often in a random and unpredictable way, to imbue every tape echo machine with a distinct character. Catalinbread wanted to replicate all these elements when developing the Belle Epoch as a hybrid analogue/digital version of the EP3 Echoplex.

Like the EP3, the Belle Epoch has a fully discrete preamp with no buffer stages or op-amps in the direct signal path. What's more, both units can accept 9v to 18v – higher voltages providing extra clean headroom for higher input levels post-boosts and overdrives.

The Echoplex delay range of 80ms to 800ms is adhered to. Echo sustain sets the number of repeats and echo delay replaces the EP3's slider for setting delay times. EP3s certainly wobbled, and getting your machine serviced was the only way to control it. Nevertheless, wow and flutter remain huge parts of the Echoplex allure and the Belle Epoch's sway/mod control allows fine adjustment.

Rec lev replicates the EP-3's 'record level', which adjusts the amount of signal hitting the tape. At the end of the signal chain, the mix control swings from fully dry through to wet, using the authentic EP-3 mixing circuitry.

Inside the box, a trimpot sets gain and volume, and a switch selects true bypass or trails mode. In trails mode, the echoes fade away when the Belle Epoch is switched off, and the guitar signal is routed through the Belle Epoch's preamp regardless of the on/off status of the pedal.

Sounds

The Belle Epoch sounded 'right' from the moment I switched it on and it's entirely believable that Eric Johnson regards it as the closest alternative to a real Maestro Echoplex EP3 that money can currently buy.

The mod control is the Belle Epoch's crowning glory. Other pedals attempt to emulate wow and flutter with simple oscillators, but the pulses are far too regular.
In contrast, the Belle Epoch shifts the pitch in a seemingly random fashion, and it's all the better for it. Mod has a huge range, but it's easy to set and it allows the pedal to generate quirky little surprises – almost as if there's something unexplained going on inside.

Record level induces a chewy and slightly fizzy overdrive characteristic that is instantly recognisable from old recordings and gels equally well with clean and overdriven amps. It's a powerful and effective feature that interacts with mix to create a huge range of tones and textures, but even at the lowest setting the Belle Epoch's delays are never entirely 'clean'. Although the dry signal can pass through untouched in true bypass, the preamp colouration of tails mode adds warmth and enhances the upper mids.

In keeping with the Echoplex's single-head design, the Belle Epoch cannot produce complex multi-tap delays. Even so, it's easy to set longer intervals and build up rhythmic patterns that float on waves of gentle modulation. With a spare pair of hands, you can even experiment with cheesy sci-fi effects and psychedelic mayhem with self-oscillation and sweeps through the echo delay range. It's enormous fun.

With shorter delay times and minimal repeats, the Belle Epoch absolutely nails authentic-sounding slapback echo, and turning echo sustain higher morphs the effect into a short and bathroom-y reverb that's eerily three-dimensional.

Wherever you set the delay time, the repeats never seem obtrusive, and the Belle Epoch has that tape echo-like ability to sit in a mix without the necessity to match delay time to tempo – it's unlikely that you'll miss a tap tempo switch.

Like the Topanga, the Belle Epoch weighs next to nothing, takes up hardly any space on a pedaboard and is completely noise-free.
In all other respects, the experience is exactly like playing through a really great tape echo.

KEY FEATURES

Catalinbread Topanga

- **DESCRIPTION** DSP reverb pedal based on the Fender 6G15 spring reverb unit. Made in the USA
- **PRICE** £159
- **CONTROLS** Dwell, tone, mix, vol, internal gain trimpot, true bypass/tails switching
- **CONTACT** Sounds Great Music 01614 364799
  www.catalinbread.com

Guitar VERDICT

+ Wide range of springy reverb tones
+ No noise
+ Extremely convincing emulation
+ Very controllable

– Spring sounds only
– DC supply only

If spring is your thing but your current amp doesn't have reverb, look no further. You might even find it becomes a cornerstone of your sound

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Catalinbread Belle Epoch

- **DESCRIPTION** DSP tape echo pedal based on the EP3 Echoplex. Made in the USA
- **PRICE** £161
- **CONTROLS** Echo sustain, mod, rec lev, mix, echo delay, internal gain trimpot, true bypass/tails switching
- **CONTACT** Sounds Great Music 01614 364799
  www.catalinbread.com

Guitar VERDICT

+ Fantastic sounds
+ Modulation feature sounds beautiful
+ Very convincing EP3 signal degradation

– More characterful than clean
– DC supply only
– Look elsewhere for multi-tap

If you want an authentic tape echo sound without all of the associated hassle, the Belle Epoch is a must-try

9/10

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ARTIST: JOE ROBINSON

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Fender Deluxe Active Jazz Bass Okoume

This updated take on the Jazz Bass format isn't flashy, but it's a worthy, understated, all-rounder. **RIK BATEY** takes it for a spin...

A brown Fender Jazz? Yes – but forget about the Mocha Brown of the 70s that so often flagged up a bass weighing the same as a small planet, for this is different. The body of this one is made up of three pieces of okoume, a central African hardwood, and it looks mighty fine... almost identical, in fact, to the natural mahogany finish on Fender's Japanese and Mexican '69 Thinline Tele reissues.

It's not a flashy bass, and if you're the kind of player who likes to fade into any situation, both musically and visually, it could be just the ticket.

Nor is it hefty. Though it has a full-sized Jazz Bass body, this one clocks in at a manageable 4.25kg/9.3lbs – we've heard some are lighter – and it actually feels a bit lighter than that, as it's very nicely balanced. Vintage fans will approvingly note the neck's slab rosewood fingerboard, the familiar 1.5-inch Jazz-width nut, the clover-leaf open-gear tuners, the white faux-clay dots and the spaghetti logo. The old-school appointments stop there, though, as the truss rod is accessed from the headstock, the fingerboard has a modern 9.5-inch radius and the frets are medium jumbos. Finished in clear gloss, the neck is sweet to navigate, and the 45-100 roundwounds suit it well.

Abandoning both scratchplate and control plate, the Okoume has rear-mounted pickups and controls, and the output jack moves to the edge. The bridge is a chrome Fender Hi-Mass unit with the saddles sliding securely in channels; with no rear recessing, the strings' ball ends do stick out a bit.

The string spacing at the bridge is 2mm less than on the bent-tin bridge of a '62 RI we have lying around – and while on that subject, though the G string is centred over its polepieces, the E is not, and there's also too much room between the E and the edge of the fingerboard. It simply requires the neck-shift manoeuvre familiar to all vintage Fender owners, but if this is a tweak that you don't feel comfortable carrying out yourself, we'd recommend enlisting the services of a professional.

If you're the kind of player who likes to fade into any situation, musically and visually, it could be just the ticket

In use

The Okoume Jazz has two Dual-Coil Ceramic Noiseless pickups linked to a master volume and a pickup pan pot, these two lying closest to the treble pickup; bass, treble and mid cut/boost are arranged over the two lower pots, one being a stacked unit. All the controls, apart from the volume, of course, have convenient centre detents. There's no active/passive switch – the preamp is on all the time. We like Fender's Noiseless bass pickups and they work well here, with all the usual shades of Jazz Bass tone from bridge to neck via the pan pot, plus well-judged EQ knobs to tweak zing, punch and boom. No complaints – and no noise.

While our sample's setup isn't perfect, the concept is pretty neat. If we said it was a bit like a 60s Jazz that somebody stripped in '73, then threw on a Badass bridge and active pickups in '85, and got it refinished in clear gloss last year, you might think we were slagging it off. Nothing could be further from the truth: it's a compliment. With the kind of modern upgrades a player might have fitted to a hard-working old Jazz out of necessity, it's a gig-worthy all-rounder with good potential.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Useful blend of vintage and modern
+ Five-string available
+ Go-anywhere looks
+ Well-judged actives

– No passive option onboard
– No finish choices
– Neck alignment slightly off

A quality-sounding active Jazz Bass with a modern-feeling neck that knuckles down and does the business instead of just shouting about it.

8/10

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE... From the same family, the **Fender Deluxe Active Precision Okoume Special £749** comes with a Jazz-width neck and a P/J layout. The **Spector Coda Pro 4 £825** is a tasty, woody-topped J-update with passive pickups and Spector 2-band actives.

KEY FEATURES

Fender Deluxe Active Jazz Bass Okoume

- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody active four-string bass. Manufactured in Mexico
- **PRICE** £749 with deluxe gigbag
- **BUILD** Three-piece okoume body, maple neck with 9.5" radius 20-fret rosewood fingerboard, gloss finish all over, synthetic bone nut, Hi-Mass bridge, standard open-gear machineheads
- **ELECTRICS** Two Dual-Coil Ceramic Noiseless Jazz Bass pickups with nickel-plated polepieces
- **CONTROLS** Master volume, pan control, three-band active EQ with treble boost/cut, bass boost/cut and mid boost/cut
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISH** Natural only
- **SCALE LENGTH** 863mm/34"
- **NECK WIDTH**
  Nut **38mm**
  12th fret **57mm**
- **DEPTH OF NECK**
  First fret **21mm**
  12th fret **23mm**
- **STRING SPACING**
  Nut **29.5mm**
  Bridge **57mm**
- **WEIGHT** 4.24kg/9.3lbs
- **CONTACT** Fender GB&I
  01342 331700
  www.fender.com

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Boss RC-1 Loop Station

A low cost, high quality looper for the performing musician

PRICE £85
CONTACT Roland UK, 01792 702701 **www.roland.co.uk**

Boss's new entry level RC-1 is a triumph of simplicity: the top panel features just a single level control and a multi-segment loop indicator. Don't be fooled; it's a powerful tool so once you learn a few basic press, double-press and press-hold operations with the stomp switch you're off into the world of seamless recording, looping and overdubbing.

As always, construction is robust. Though the 'compact' Boss format looks a little chunky next to some of the micro-pedal designs in vogue at the moment, it's sometimes helpful to have a bigger target underfoot when timing is critical.

The RC-1 is a stereo looper so naturally you can create loops featuring stereo effects, but it also means that you can synchronise two different instruments and send them out to separate amps or mixer channels: connecting a second source to input B automatically splits the stereo output. Until you do this, a mono signal is presented at both outputs – very nifty if you want to use two amplifiers, or send a feed to a recorder.

As a junior sibling to the RC-3, the feature set is quite limited: there's no USB for archiving or downloading audio, no auxiliary input, no rhythm guide, no presets for storing loops (other than the one you've just recorded, which remains in the unit's memory) and just 12 minutes of stereo recording time compared to the RC-3's 99 presets and massive three-hour storage capacity. As such, this is definitely a tool for the musician who likes to work from the ground up in the live environment, but this simplicity may also appeal to those who just want a neat way to practice soloing over chord patterns.

One innovative feature that the RC-1 has in its favour is the new display. 24 LED segments cycle red when recording, red/green when overdubbing and green when playing back. As soon as you've recorded a loop, the overall cycle indicates loop length. This is extremely useful for improvising or people who work with less structured atmospheres or longer loops; knowing exactly where you are in the cycle is brilliant.

In use

The RC-1 sounds great and is really easy to use. The Undo/Redo function is a practical inclusion that will save your bacon sooner or later, and if accessing it via the press/hold method while in overdub mode becomes tedious then you can plug in an additional footswitch for one-touch operation. The unit's default setting goes straight from record to overdub mode and then play mode – and there's a start-up option that changes the overdub/play order if this suits your style better. **ML**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

An excellent looper that's well suited to live performance and practice applications. The new loop indicator is a great feature.

8/10

Yerasov Gavrosh-8

A compact pedal platform for the home, from Russia with love

PRICE £219
CONTACT Yerasov UK, 07534 429269 **www.yerasov.co.uk**

While we don't see that much Russian guitar technology here in the UK, Yerasov is rapidly establishing a reputation for turning out good-sounding valve amps that cater to a wide range of tastes with prices that are hard to beat.

This Gavrosh-8 is a simple proposition: a mini class AB three-watt (don't let the -8 fool you) valve amp driving a single eight-inch Celestion T5183A 15W speaker. Small it may be, and light at 6.5kg/14.3lbs, but there are some useful features here such as a headphone/line out socket and also a speaker off button so you can blast your own ears while the kids sleep peacefully in the next room. The top panel controls are straightforward: volume, bass and treble. The slightly mysterious filter button is designed to take out the 'sand' when using overdrive pedals.

In terms of construction the Gavrosh is a chunky little chap, and both the black metal grille and the heavily-textured beige vinyl will survive numerous trips to the car. Internally, the PCB is neatly laid out and, as you'd expect at this price, the valve mounts are directly affixed to the board. There's a quintessentially Soviet duo of valves in terms of a 6N2P and a 6N23P plus a more familiar ECC83/12AX7.

In use

To some extent the Gavrosh-8 goes against the contemporary orthodoxy of low-wattage valve amp design. Rather than offering low-volume drive, it's designed to stay as clean as possible all the way up. When it does start distorting the result isn't especially pleasing, but this is a fact that the maker recognises, advising players to use external processors for overdrive.

It sounds rich and gutsy in a way that few solid-state amps, modelling or otherwise, can achieve

Happily, the cleans are rich and musical. As you might expect, the speaker is a little bass-light, but overall the sound is open and likeable. When engaged, the filter control offers a smoother character. My preferred setting is to turn everything up and control the amp from the guitar, but for drive tones it's best to bring the amp level down and run the guitar wide open. In this context the unit performs well with a range of dirt pedals; it's rich and gutsy in a way that very few solid-state amps, modelling or otherwise, can achieve. **ML**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

A good, basic practice amp at a fair price with great build quality for the money. You'll need pedals if you want to rock out.

7/10

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Nashville thought Hank Williams was trouble.
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Vintage PRIVATE COLLECTION

BASS DESIRES

It's all about the bass for Nick Smith, with the emphasis on imaginative design and great quality. **LARS MULLEN** visits a place where the four-string is king...

Nick Smith has been a pro bass player since 2001, doing theatre jobs and working with a multitude of bands, many rooted in the 60s. Inspired by his musician father, Stuart, he began his career in a rock 'n' roll outfit called The Mick Lemmon Band, and eventually found his niche in the scene surrounding The Shadows, going on to work with names such as Mike Berry & The Outlaws, John Leyton & The Flames, Jet Harris and Brian 'Licorice' Locking. So is his collection all about Burns and Fender? Far from it...

"The golden age for bass players, for me, was the 80s and 90s," says Nick. "We'd been stuck at the back for so long, but suddenly all these people were exploding into view: Mark King, Sting, Mick Karn, Pino Palladino, John Taylor...

"It was a great time for bass design, too. Luthiers were thinking about basses as a separate entity, and I'm a big fan of UK custom builders of the period. The Japanese instruments were also excellent – I am particularly keen on the various brands that came out of the Matsumoku factory."

There are plenty of traditional basses here, though. "For me, the Fender Precision is where it all started. It's like the founding father of bass. My second bass, when I was 13, was this '83 Precision, which I had sprayed Fiesta Red for that Shadows look. I also have a 1982 Squier JV, one of the first ones with the small Squier and larger Fender logos – I used this one with Mike Berry & The Outlaws – and a sparkly blue Precision from the 1990s.

'The Fender Jazz is, of course, another classic; I have a Fender Road Worn fitted with a Babicz bridge, which I use for teaching, and a five-string, which is really good for reggae.

"The next five are a contrasting bunch – an orange flamed 80s Tokai with a single DiMarzio, a white refinished Hohner, which belonged to the bass player in my dad's band, a Kawai which shows a big Alembic influence, a five-string Westone Pantera with close string spacing, and a Westone Thunder II with a lot of Aria similarities.

"These French Vigier basses are pretty exotic. I have a Passion model, and an Arpege, which was my main bass for years – great to play, and it has no dead spots at all, thanks to the neck design."

It's back to Fender for our next handful. Nick continues: "I have a Squier Classic Vibe Jazz with >

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L-R: 1983 Fiesta Red refin Precision, 1982 Squier '57 JV with first-series Squier/Fender logos, 1990s blue Precision, Road Worn Jazz with Babicz bridge, five-string Jazz

L-R: orange flame-top Tokai, white Hohner, Japanese Kawai, five-string Westone Pantera, Westone Thunder II

L-R: Vigier Passion, Vigier Arpege

BassWorldMag.net

L-R: Squier Classic Vibe Jazz, Squier Classic Vibe 60s Precision, Shadows-signed '83 Squier, '57 Precision Squier Bass VI, blue 50s Squier Classic Vibe Precision

L-R: Spector NS2, four-string Tobias Killer B, Tobias Basic 5

L-R: Guild Pilot, Kubicki Ex Factor, stereo Carvin

L-R: Ibanez Musician, Roadster and Roadstar

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a natural finish. Then there's a Fiesta Red Squier Classic Vibe 60s Precision with a tortoiseshell scratchplate, which is pretty cool, plus another Squier JV Precision – a '57 model in Fiesta Red from 1983, which has been signed by several bassists who played with The Shadows. The Squier Bass VI is a recent addition; my dad had an original, which I used to play, so this was a nostalgia trip. Finally, there's a Classic Vibe 50s Precision in Metallic Blue. Squiers are good value. I'm not a badge snob by any means – I'll happily gig with any one of them.

"I'm a massive fan of Chris Squire of Yes, and he uses Tobias, another favourite brand of mine. I have a five-string Basic 5, and a four-string Killer B. On the left, that's a Spector NS2."

The black trio display more of Nick's varied tastes. "The Guild Pilot is a bass I always adored," he explains, "while the Kubicki Ex Factor has the drop D tuner on the E string. Kubicki worked for Fender for a while, but left to design his own basses. His company was later bought out by Fender, so this is actually a Fender Custom Shop bass. On the right is a stereo Carvin, as played by Ben Orr with The Cars at Live Aid in 1985. I love the look of it!

"Ibanez produced some of the best basses of that period. I have an '82 Ibanez Musician in Pearl White – as played by Martin Kemp in Spandau Ballet, a sunburst fretless Roadster with a maple fingerboard, and a white Roadstar.

"Status Graphite made some of the most recognisable headless basses. I'm a huge fan – I had nine at one time! The Jaydee Classic is a replica of the 0002 model that belonged to Mark King; I owned that one for a while. And next to that is an E Bass, which I built in collaboration with Ian Hancock; we went into production with it in 2000. It's got Kent Armstrong pickups. I must say, it's a cool bass, and it had some pretty good reviews.

"Arias have a lot of significance for me, and here are five – a black SB Special Two, a five-string SB-505, a two-pickup Cardinal CSB Deluxe, a Classic Laser bass, and a blue RSB Performer."

Nick is pictured on the right holding the Aria that began his passion for the brand. "As a youngster, I tried a Jazz and a Precision, but they were still far too big for me, so I settled on an Aria Pro II Cardinal Series CSB450 in Cherry Sunburst, which cost £130. Later on, I traded it in for a >

Top **L-R: Status, Jaydee Classic Mark King, E Bass**
Above right **Aria CSB450**
Above left **L-R: black Aria SB Special Two, five-string Aria SB 505, Aria Cardinal CSB Deluxe, Aria Classic Laser, blue Aria RSB Performer**

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Above **L-R: fretless Wal, ex-Mario Cipollina six-string Warwick**
Top **L-R: Pangborn Warrior, Pangborn Warlord, Pangborn Chieftain**
Above right **L-R: custom Bluesman Vintage, circa 1973 Alembic, Rickenbacker 4001CS Chris Squire signature, custom Skjold bass**

Precision – they valued it at £130! And five years after that I was driving past a music shop window and saw my old CSB450, so I bought it a second time... for £130!'

The basses above left come from the UK and Germany. "My fretless Wal dates from 1984... it was the session player's ultimate choice at the time. The big six-string Warwick was built for the Bass Centre in LA, and it was used by Mario Cipollina of Huey Lewis and the News."

At the top of the page are three custom basses by the UK's Ashley Pangborn. "Ashley was based in Dulwich in London," explains Nick. "Pangborn is one of those near-forgotten brands, but he was doing great things. All these are active through-neck designs... a Warrior, a Warlord and a Chieftain."

The next four are a real mixture. "I had this Bluesman Vintage specially built for me by a guy called John Scott in Tennessee. It's based on a Fender, but I worked with him to fine-tune the details, and he finished it in Fiesta Red. I'm really pleased, and it's really light, too.

"Alembic paved the way with through-neck designs, active EQs and exotic hardwoods, and Mark King and Stanley Clarke were known for playing them. This one lacks a serial, but I believe it's from around '73 – it could even be the very one in some photos I have of John Entwistle. It might have been a special order. It's heavy to gig with, but a classic.

"I mentioned Chris Squire of Yes earlier on. In the psychedelic years, he would paste different layers of flowery wallpaper on his Rickenbacker 4001, and when the time came to remove it he took it to a luthier in Soho, Sam Li, who had to plane it all off! That meant it had a thinner body, and Rickenbacker copied that feature on his signature model. I've had mine for 20 years, and I love it.

"I also have this handmade Skjold bass from Warsaw, Ohio, with a Denim Blue flame top... a really well-made bass that sounds stunning."

Peeking in at the top of the next page are two Yamahas. "Yamaha were up there with the best of them with their BB Series basses. The white fretless is a BB3000AF with a through-neck, and the Metallic Silver one is an active BB614.

"Washburns were always high on my wish-list as a youngster. I have a Wing Series Vulture and a pair of Force 42 models, with the same body design, but >

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Above **L-R: fretless Yamaha BB3000AF, Yamaha BB614**
Top **L-R: Washburn Vulture, Washburn Force 42 fretless, Washburn Force 42 fretted**
Above right **L-R: Aria SB-R90, SB1000, SB-R60**
Right **L-R: Yamaha BBG4, black BB400S fretless, silver RBX374**

headless – one fretless and one fretted. These are all great quality, made by the Matsumoku factory... I picked them both up on eBay.

"John Taylor, of course, used to use an Aria SB bass. All the girls liked Duran Duran; all us guys said they were rubbish, but secretly we were big fans! These days, I have three SBs – a two-pickup model, which to the best of my knowledge is an SB-R90, though it's missing a number, a single-pickup SB1000, and an SB-R60. To my mind, these are some of the best basses ever made... to make one of this calibre now would cost thousands. Finally, three more of my Yamahas... a BBG4 with a photoflame top, a black BB400S fretless, and a silver RBX374."

Nick's collection displays a great combination of classic Fender-influenced bass design and 80s forward thinking, so where does he feel the future of bass design lies? "Well, while the 80s and 90s is my main area of interest, I do look at new designs, and I think some of them are cool," he reflects. "All the same, a lot of makers are still looking back to some of the timeless designs. Look at Music Man... they're still as popular today as they were in the 70s, and still influencing players today."

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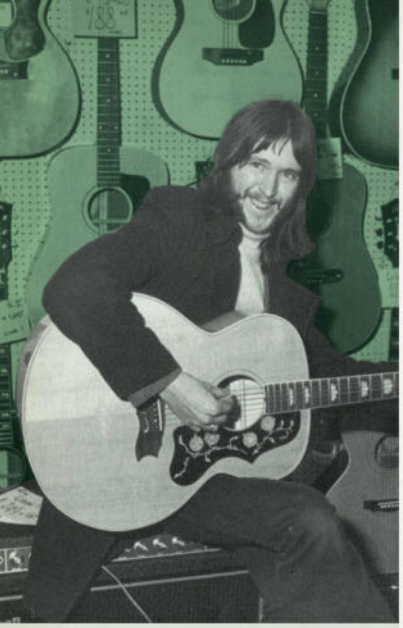

TREADING THE BOARDS

From empty backstreet pubs to sold-out gigs at legendary venues, **SID BISHOP** has clocked up the touring miles and has some essential advice for bands getting ready to hit the road...

SID BISHOP

During his tenure at the Top Gear store on London's iconic Denmark Street, Sid dealt with multitudes of famous musicians. Having been around, in his own words "before vintage guitars were invented", Sid got up close and personal with thousands of drool-worthy instruments. Luckily for us, he's willing to share his stories and wisdom about all things guitar-related.

We will probably all reach a point when we feel we've learned to play guitar to a reasonably competent standard, invested in the best equipment we can afford and, somehow, met up with a few other people of a like mind. Hopefully, one will be a drummer, one a bass player, and one will be able to sing. This, at the most fundamental level, is all you need to go out and find some gigs.

And that's what you do next. Why? We need to show people what we can do, prove to ourselves we can do it, and maybe meet some people of the opposite sex. But where does one start? The road to stardom we know we are destined for has to begin somewhere, and most of us will head to the nearest pub that has live music and talk the landlord into giving our band a go. That's the start of our life on the road – though, inevitably, some will have greater success than others.

Local pubs are generally the first port of call for any band, though such pubs are thinner on the ground now than when I was playing in my glory days 30 or 40 years ago. Pubs were the bread and butter of any working band. They varied in size, from the likes of The Cricketers in Southend or The Greyhound in Fulham Palace Road, which would hold 300 or 400 sweaty and enthusiastic music fans, down to others that would barely hold 30, with a stage so small that once the drums were set up, everything else had to be positioned on the floor.

I've played in places that were heaving and had sweat running down the walls, and a couple of nights later to a couple of grumpy old geezers and a dog. Bad news if you got paid according to the amount of beer that got sold. I can vividly recall playing at a pub called The Star in Thornton Heath and the whole band getting paid £3. We packed the gear away in the van, feeling thoroughly deflated and wondering whether our musical careers were worthwhile. The following night, we did Battersea Town Hall and went down a storm to a sell-out crowd. That's the way it goes.

> *"I've played in places that were heaving, and to a couple of grumpy old geezers and a dog"*

One principal source of income was the circuit of university gigs. They always paid well. Regular venues were the University of East Anglia (Norwich), Sussex University (Brighton), Brunel, the LSE, Goldsmiths, Leeds Uni and ASL – the American School, in St John's Wood. I also enviously perused the ads in *Melody Maker* and dreamt of playing at the legendary Marquee Club, the Roundhouse, Newcastle City Hall, Dunstable's Queensway Hall (now the site of an Asda), or even the Royal Festival Hall. I eventually got to perform at all of those places. My final words on the subject: get yourself a good agent!

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EVERYTHING MUST GO...

There comes a time in every guitar collector's life when it's time for the dreaded clear-out. **PHIL HARRIS** has been making some very difficult decisions...

PHIL HARRIS

This industry legend has been a guitar fanatic since childhood, quickly acquiring a Les Paul obsession that has never left him. During his long professional playing career, he provided lead guitar for the likes of Edgar Broughton (as well as, briefly, Thin Lizzy), before starting a guitar hire company specialising in vintage gear. A long-time consultant for the likes of Sotheby's and Christie's, Phil's encyclopedic knowledge of classic gear (most of which he's played and/or owned at some point) is beyond compare.

There are many ebbs and flows in a collector's life, when your collection gets bigger or smaller because of circumstance. I'm currently in the middle of downsizing. After 30 years, I'm winding up my hire company; changes in the music industry mean fewer artists have got deals, while those still making records are taking advantage of digital technology. This means the demand to hire vintage instruments isn't anywhere near as high. And as I'm approaching my seventh decade, now seems the right time for a clear-out.

Some things have been easy to let go, particularly those bought solely for the hire company, that I had no real personal interest in. But the ability to buy things that would (hopefully) earn their keep has allowed me to fuel my passion for guitars.

If I was a billionaire, part of me would like to build a museum for everything I have

I'm trying to stick to my plan of only keeping things that I'm going to use, but if I was a multi-billionaire, there's a part of me that would like to build a museum for everything I have and invite people to view it. I have reached a point where the status of an instrument doesn't appeal so much: it doesn't have to be 'Kalamazoo', or whatever, and I don't need to be able to smell the Brylcreem of the person who sprayed the original finish. The instruments I'm keeping need to be good ones, but it's more about the personal connection I have with them. A friend recently said to me: "Well, I guess you're going to keep a 50s Strat." He was surprised to hear that I wasn't. And he was quite right to be; after all, at one point in the 80s I had more than 30 pre-CBS Strats. But the Strat that I'm keeping is one that's had the original finish sanded down, which reminds me of my first Strat.

I recently spoke to Len Tuckey, who played in The Attack, The Nashville Teens and with Suzi Quatro. I've known him since I was 17 and once supported his band. He reminded me I played a Dan Armstrong Plexi that night, and the sound I got convinced him it wasn't just a novelty guitar. Once he sparked that memory, that was it – the Dan Armstrong was staying.

For most of the rest, I'm going to consider myself fortunate to have known them, and ensure they go to new owners who cherish them. After all, what's the alternative? Keep them until I shuffle off this earth, get a pyramid built in my honour, and have them buried with my sarcophagus? I do know a few collectors who would consider doing just that...

1974 *Electro-Harmonix Screaming Bird*

Although it isn't much to look at, and it's not worth much, this one's going nowhere. It was one of my secret weapons back when I was a pro player, and it really boosts your sound in a really soulful way

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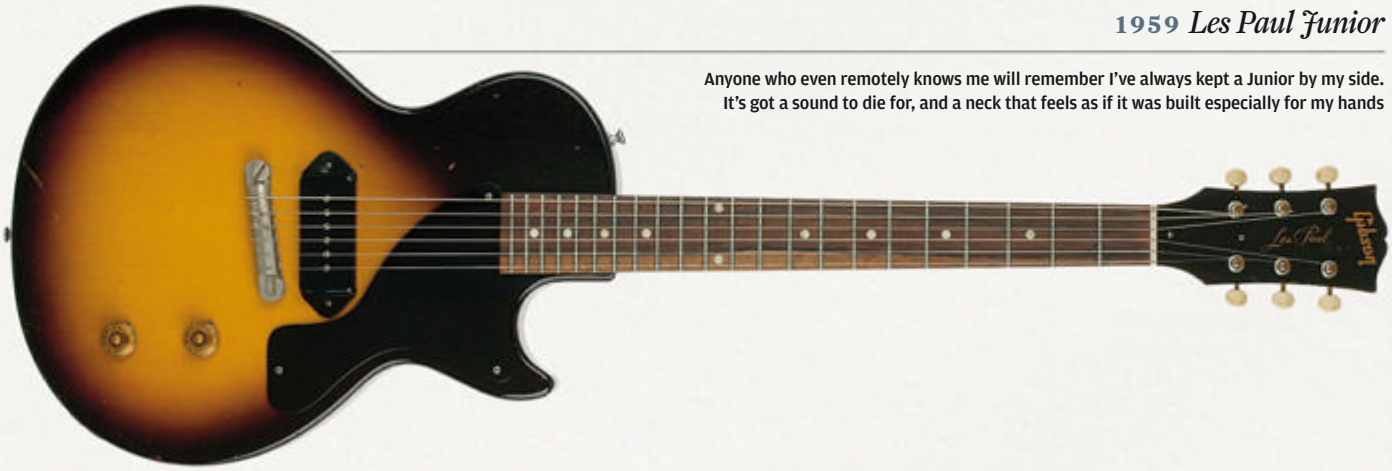
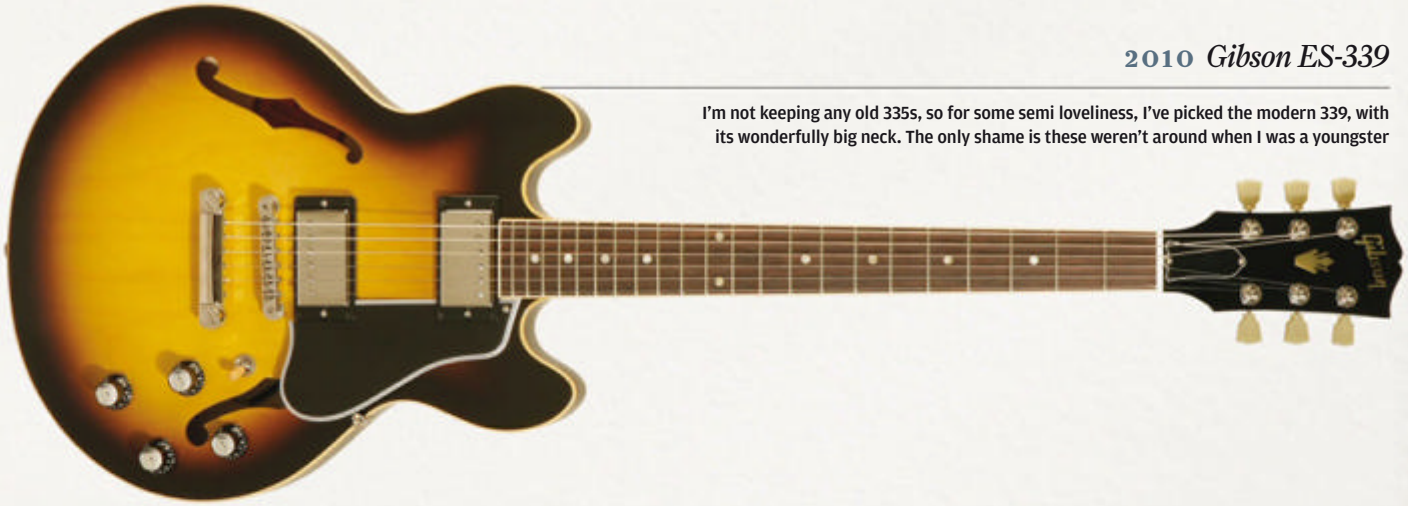
1959 *Les Paul Junior*

Anyone who even remotely knows me will remember I've always kept a Junior by my side. It's got a sound to die for, and a neck that feels as if it was built especially for my hands



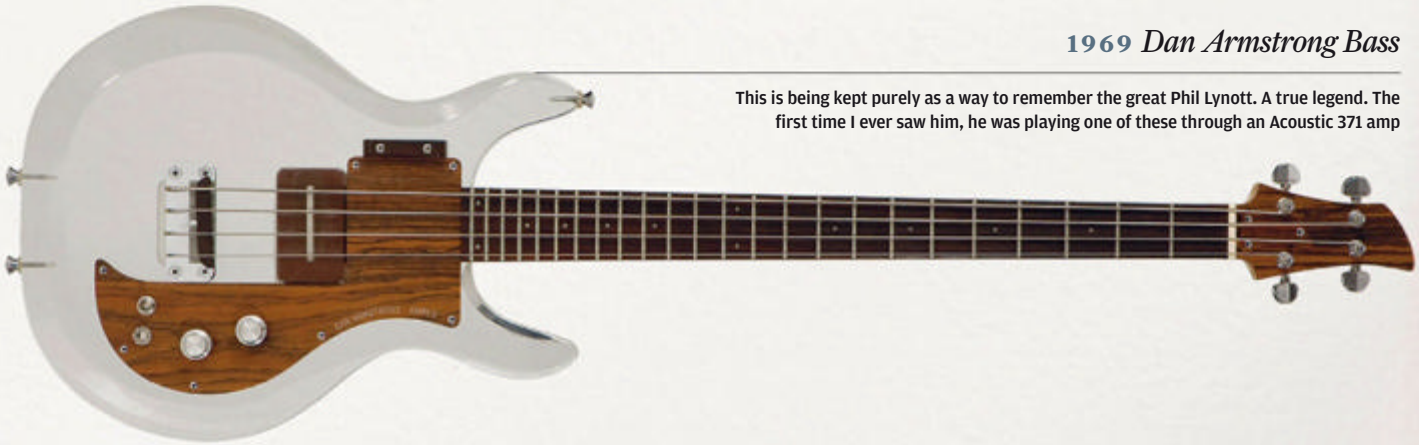
2010 *Gibson ES-339*

I'm not keeping any old 335s, so for some semi loveliness, I've picked the modern 339, with its wonderfully big neck. The only shame is these weren't around when I was a youngster



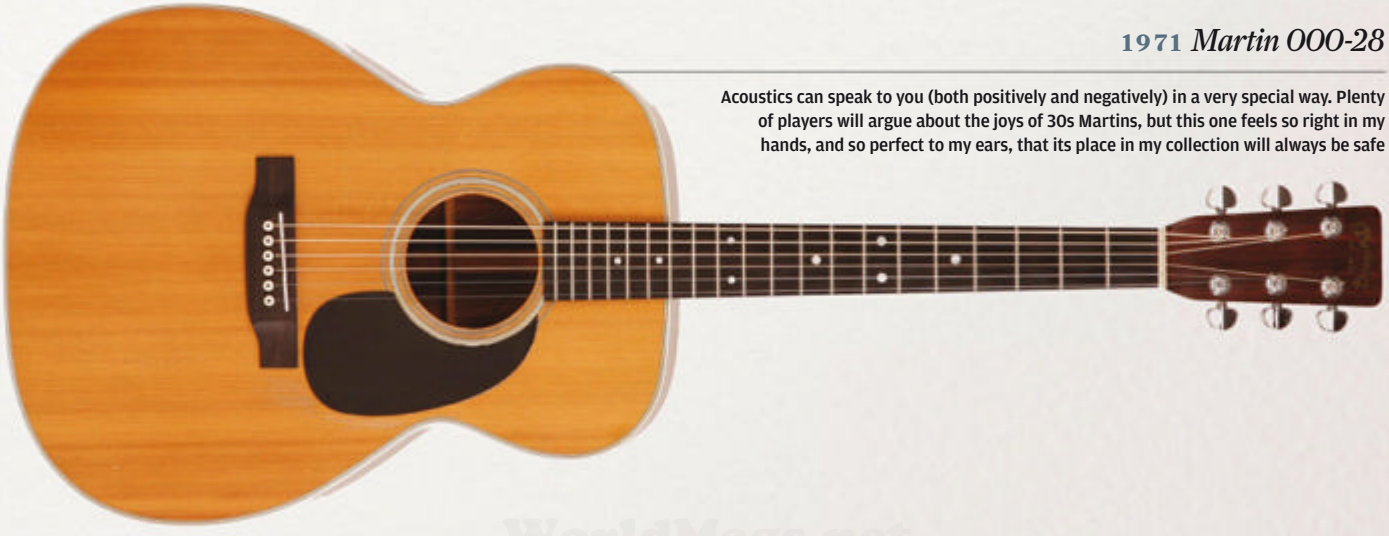
1969 *Dan Armstrong Bass*

This is being kept purely as a way to remember the great Phil Lynott. A true legend. The first time I ever saw him, he was playing one of these through an Acoustic 371 amp



1971 *Martin OOO-28*

Acoustics can speak to you (both positively and negatively) in a very special way. Plenty of players will argue about the joys of 30s Martins, but this one feels so right in my hands, and so perfect to my ears, that its place in my collection will always be safe



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Vintage PRIVATE COLLECTION

BEAUTY IN THE BURST

Tom Wittrock is one of the world's foremost experts on golden-era Gibson Les Pauls. **DAVID PLUES** takes a closer look at his amazing collection...

Tom Wittrock is the owner of Third Eye Music in Springfield, Missouri, and the long-time host and co-owner of the Les Paul Forum, an online discussion group that attracts a huge number of hits from members sharing news and views and searching for information on vintage Gibsons, and especially 1952-1960 Les Pauls. Tom has also contributed to many well-known books on the subject, such as Yasuhiko Iwanade's *Beauty Of The 'Burst*, Tom Wheeler's *American Guitars: An Illustrated History* and Vic DaPra's *Burst Believers* series.

Back in the early 1970s, when the vintage guitar phenomenon was in its infancy, Tom's friends thought he was crazy to spend as much as $2,000 on a second-hand Les Paul when brand new ones could be obtained for half the price. Tom thought differently: an accomplished guitarist himself, he had spent untold hours listening to players such as Peter Green and Eric Clapton, and he'd formed the opinion that these sounds simply could not be obtained on the production guitars of the time. It was a realisation that sparked the beginning of a lifetime's dedication to old Les Pauls.

Over the years, many guitars have passed through Tom's hands, including a very impressive 60 sunburst Les Paul Standards from the golden era of 1958-1960. Photograph 1 was taken at an early Dallas Guitar Show in 1981 and shows a very young Tom with an early collection of Les Pauls. He hasn't kept them all – some ended up in the care of well-known players such as Slash and Gary Moore – but he became attached to many of them, and they remain in his collection today.

We start our tour of Tom's amazing Les Paul assembly with 2 a line-up of 'bursts – two 1958s, two 1959s, a refinished 1959 and a 1960 – and we'll look at each one in more detail. By coincidence, the two 1958s are only two serial numbers apart; as you can see from photo 3, serial 8-5386, the example on the left, is more faded due to exposure over the years to UV light, while 8-5388, on the right, retains plenty of red in its sunburst... a feature not often seen with '58s.

Next, we move on to Les Paul serial number 9-1228, aka 'Sandy' 4, a fantastic-sounding guitar that was loaned to Joe Bonamassa for his 2012 USA tour. It was chosen by Gibson as #4 in the >

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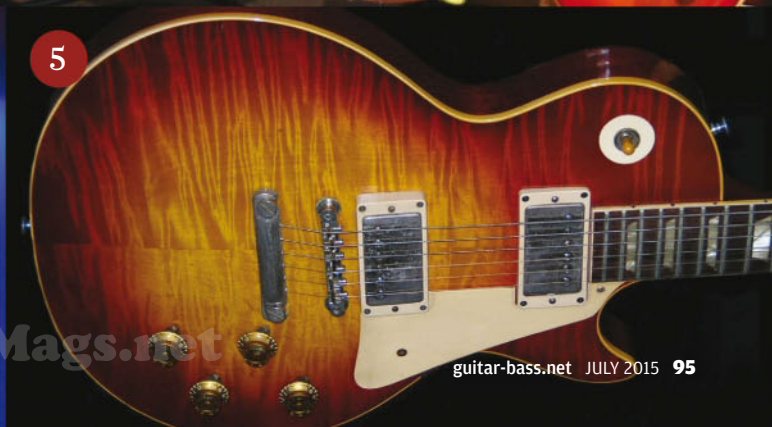
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Collector's Choice production run. The guitar known as 'Donna', serial 9-1923 and shown in photo 5, is perhaps the finest example of a sunburst among Tom's Les Pauls, with a wonderful non-faded colour and a flame that shimmers with an almost three-dimensional quality. This particular guitar will be #5 in Gibson's Collector's Choice series... quite an honour.

The fifth 'burst in photo 2, also a 1959, was refinished to resemble what a '59 Les Paul Standard would have looked like fresh out of the factory. Most of the parts are original to this example, including the electronics and plastics, and Tom particularly enjoys this guitar's playability and great tone.

A 1960 Les Paul, serial 0-7448 and nicknamed 'Curly' 6, completes this first line-up. This was Tom's first sunburst, a great-sounding guitar with the classic 1960 thin neck profile. Incidentally, it's often possible to inspect these guitars at the Dallas and Arlington guitar shows, and many are featured on a Les Paul poster that Tom produced in the 1990s – an item which has become a collector's piece and can be seen hanging in the Gibson offices.

Tom's 1956 Les Paul Goldtop 7 is named 'GI Paul' because the finish resembles the US >

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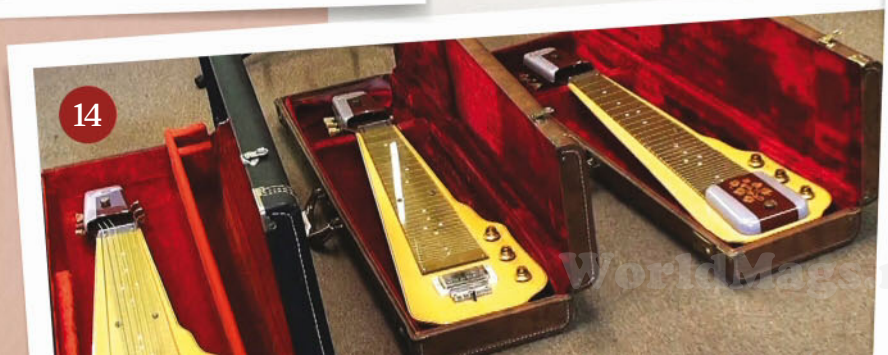
13

Army's khaki green combat colours – and it looks as if it has been in a few battles, too. Tom traded this for a 1956 refinished Strat in 1980. The back of the neck has been re-lacquered; a pair of humbuckers, now Seymour Duncan Alnico Pro IIs, replaced the original P-90s, and the bridge – with its graphite saddles – is a retro-fit. "This isn't a pretty guitar, but it's a great-sounding one," says Tom. It remains his regular gigging instrument – note the wear to the finish around the lower part of the pickguard, the mark of where Tom's little finger rests.

The 'lesser' Les Pauls include a 1957 Goldtop with black hardware 8. This guitar is in wonderful condition, and the black/gold combination received a lot of publicity when Joe Bonamassa chose the style as his signature model. The 1955 factory-finished black Les Paul in the same photo has no serial number or 'Les Paul' signature, and it's also missing the ring off the selector switch, known as a 'poker chip'. Several experts have concurred that it is a genuine Les Paul, but its history remains a mystery.

Next, we have a '53 Goldtop with the wrap tailpiece 9 that replaced the earlier trapeze models. Made of lightweight mahogany, this guitar comes in at just 8lbs. We also have a flat-bodied 1956 Les Paul Special in limed mahogany, and a single-cutaway 1958 Les Paul Junior and a double-cutaway 1959 Junior complete the line-up 10. In photo 11, Tom is shown with a couple more Juniors – a 1957 and a 1959. These are great-sounding guitars, highly favoured by many players.

Tom has examples from each year of the 'dot neck' ES-335 era, as shown in photo 12 – a 1958, a 1959 and a 1960, all in sunburst, and a 1961 and a 1962, both in Cherry Red. The 1958 is an early example, with no fingerboard binding; the 1959 >



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Tom at Gibson Nashville choosing tops for Collector's Choice #5

has all the features that fans of the 335 – the workhorse of so many guitarists – look for, including the 'long' pickguard, and it's an exceptionally clean guitar. The two Cherry Red examples feature the shorter pickguard, and 1962 was the last year the dot inlay fingerboard appeared.

The two natural- or 'blonde'-finish ES-175s 13 are great instruments. The 1957 with Bigsby and the 1959, with its replaced plain tailpiece, both have the sought-after PAF pickups, as opposed to the earlier P-90s. The ES-175 has been in the Gibson catalogue since 1949, and there are no plans to remove it any time soon. Used by jazz and rock players alike, they are wonderful instruments.

Before leaving Tom's Gibson collection, we'll mention the three spectacular Ultratone lap steels 14. These date from the late 50s – the 'burst era – and share not only the serial number format, but also various parts with the Les Paul Standards; the PAF pickups, cream plastic pickup rings, jack plate, knobs and tuners make these instruments highly sought after, for the parts alone 15. Costing just $159 back in 1959, these are some of Gibson's prettiest lap steels.

Though Tom is known for his dedication to Les Pauls, he does have some Fenders in his collection 16. These include a 1955 hardtail (non-trem) Stratocaster, one of his all-time favourites, plus a beautiful and rare custom-colour blonde 1956 Stratocaster with a sharp V-shaped neck profile – Tom's first vintage Fender. The blonde '56 was originally sold by Caldwell's in San Antonio, along with a tweed Fender Tremolux, but the customer later returned them to the same shop. Tom bought >

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SUNBURST

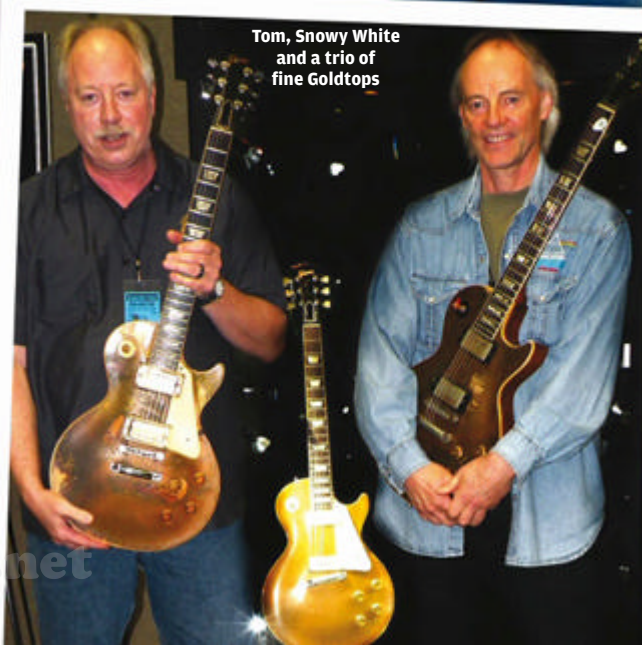
them in the early 1970s, so both guitar and amp remain together.

Tom's 1958 Strat is one of the last two-tone sunburst maple necks, and his hardtail Dakota Red rosewood-board Strat, with the serial number 66666, is appropriately named 'The Red Devil'. The 1966 Precision 17 with beautiful birdseye maple neck 18 almost didn't make the collection; after travelling 300 miles to buy a few guitars, Tom passed on this one, then after a sleepless night realised his mistake and returned to buy it!

The amp collection 19 is modest, with four Gibson GA40s; the one with the Les Paul silkscreen logo in black dates from 1953-54, while the two-tone is circa 1958. The Tremolux goes with the '56 blonde Strat, while a fine 1960 Fender Champ was originally traded for a small Persian rug! Other highlights include a pair of Johan Gustavssons 20 and a project guitar 21 made by Tom's former trading partner, Frank Carnahan, which was named 'Atro-V' (a play on the word atrophy, due to the shortened 'V'). Frank made only five guitars, including two of these Atro-Vs, and they are fine guitars.

As a dealer, Tom's guitar collection does change, and the search goes on for clean instruments. Some are kept for a while, played, and then traded... but the exception are the 1958-60 Les Paul Standards. Those, above all, are just too special to part with.

21



Tom, Snowy White and a trio of fine Goldtops

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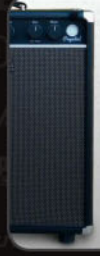

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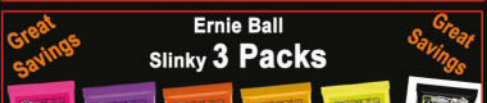

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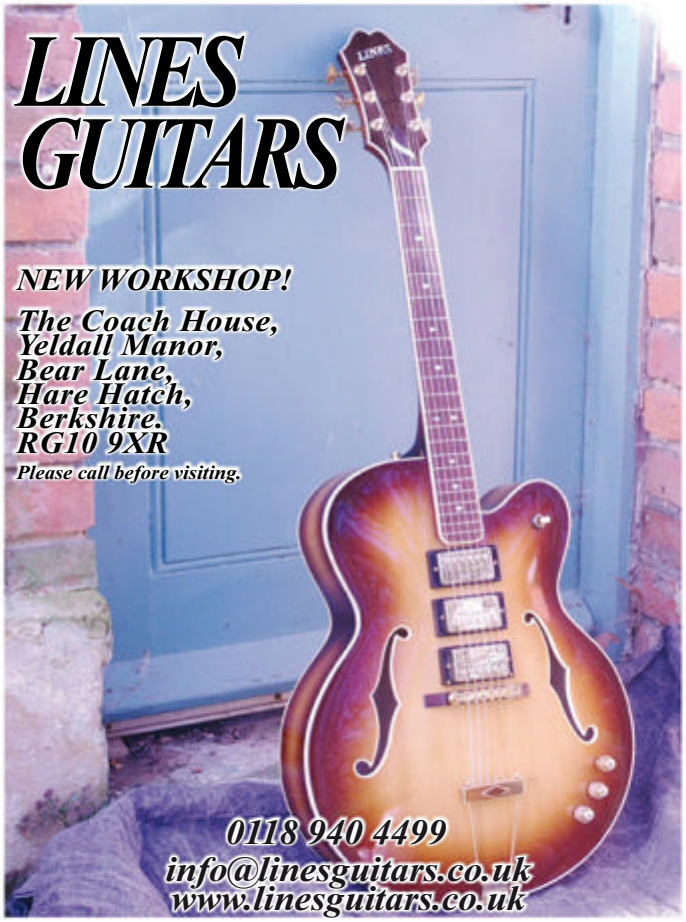

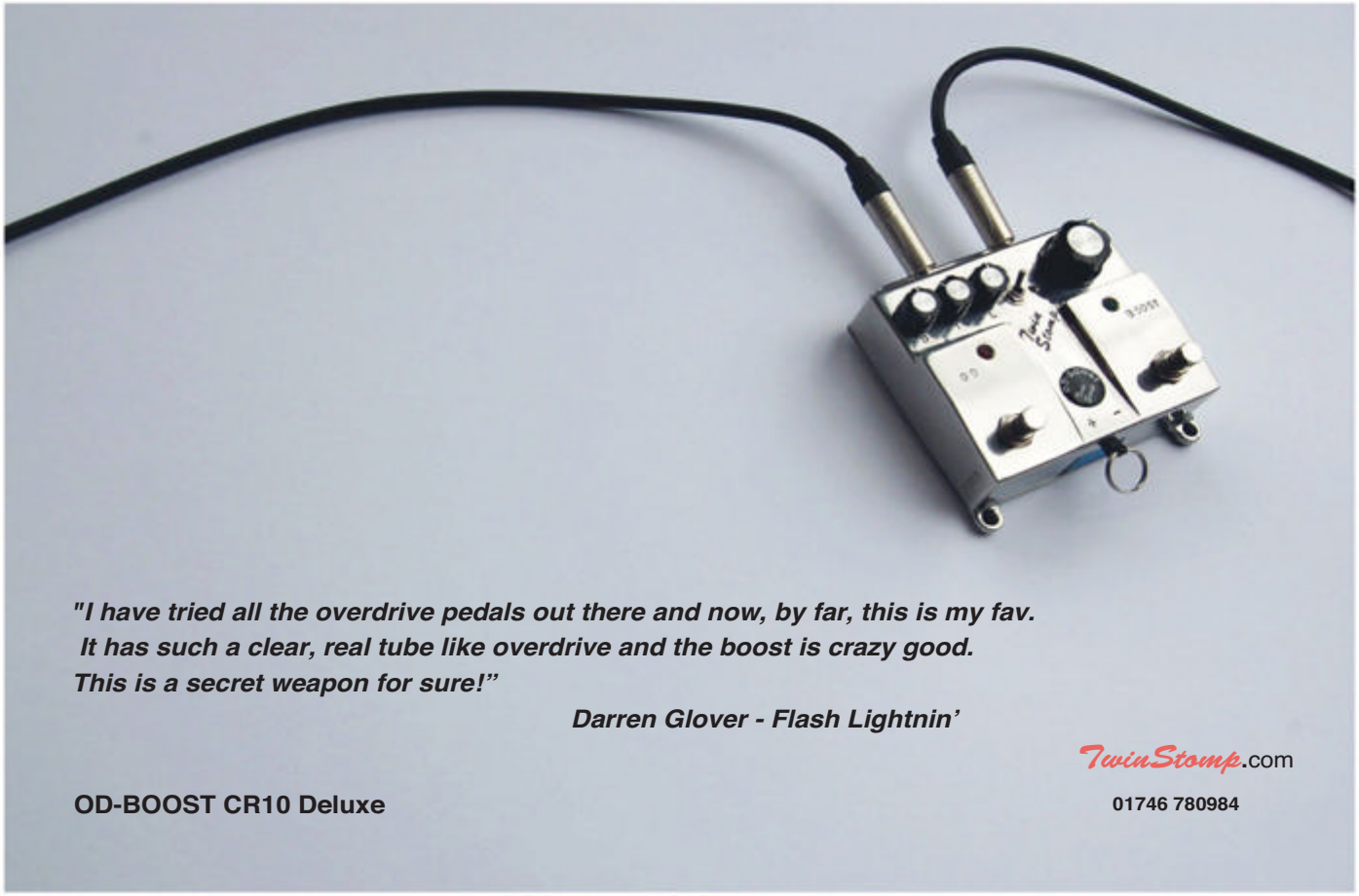

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Six of the best

Take inspiration from the sounds of yesteryear with these retro effects and give your rig a shot in the arm today

Boss DM-2W

PRICE £129 **CONTACT** Roland UK 01792 702701 **www.roland.co.uk**

Discontinued back in 1984, the Boss DM-2 analogue delay pedal's warm, bucket brigade tone was a fantastic tool, both for 50s rockabilly slapback and wilder atmospheric textures. Somewhat inevitably, second-hand prices for original units have rocketed in recent years, but happily, the compact purple delay has been reborn as the DM-2W in the new Waza Craft range. Standard mode reproduces the classic DM-2 tone and 20-300ms delay range of the original, while Custom mode cleans up the repeats and doubles the available delay time. You can also attach an expression pedal to control the delay time on the fly.

Strymon Flint

PRICE £279 **CONTACT** MusicPsych 020 7607 6005 **www.strymon.net**

There was a time when reverb and tremolo were the only effects at the disposal of most guitarists. Strymon's Flint uses modern digital processing to channel the sultry analogue throb of three vintage tremolo effects: the '61 Harmonic, '63 Power Tube and '65 Photo Cell. Alongside those voices, you get a trio of reverbs based on a 1960s spring reverb tank, a 70s plate and the hall reverb from a 1980s rack processor. Highly tweakable, you can also route the tremolo before or after the 'verb in the signal chain. Just try not to lose too many hours playing *How Soon Is Now?* or the *Twin Peaks* theme...

The King Fuzz was inspired partly by the vintage fuzz tones of Dan Auerbach of the Black Keys. You won't want to switch it off

Bigfoot Engineering King Fuzz

PRICE £129 **CONTACT** Bigfoot Engineering 01403 258776 **www.bigfootengineering.com**

With just big ol' gain and volume dials on its canary-yellow chassis, you'd be forgiven for thinking that this is a fuzzbox with a limited range, but you'd be wrong. Hand-built in West Sussex by Bigfoot main man Rhys Stubbs, the King Fuzz was inspired partly by the vintage fuzz tones of Dan Auerbach of The Black Keys. Step on the pedal and ride your guitar's volume control for everything from small valve amp-style break-up to visceral, Jimi-style fuzz that's rich in midrange attitude. You won't want to switch it off.

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The Lemon Drop harks back to the hybrid 4 and 7 Series Vox amplifiers used by The Beatles during the Revolver sessions and a certain James Patrick Page

Mid-Fi Electronics Demo Tape Fuzz

PRICE $225 **CONTACT** Mid-Fi Electronics midfielectronics@hotmail.com **www.midfielectronics.com**

Elsewhere in this issue, Barrie Cadogan extols the sonic virtues of the humble four-track cassette recorder, and though it may offend the purists amongst you, there's often something to be said for guitar tones that are just plain scratchy and nasty. Unless you fancy devoting pedalboard space to a Tascam Porta 07, this stompbox is your best bet for dragging crunchy, direct-injected four-track sounds out of a 1980s bedroom and onto the modern stage. Bass, treble, volume and trim controls allow for plenty of nostalgic tone-shaping – it's a wildcard, alright, but we like it.

Lovepedal Les Lius

PRICE £139 **CONTACT** Andertons Music 01483 456777 **www.lovepedal.com**

We'd all love to get our hands on an original 50s Fender, but not many of us have the budget to buy one and keep it maintained. Fewer still play on big enough stages to crank one up and enjoy the glory of its overdriven voice. There are plenty of 'tweed amp in a box' pedals, but this is our favourite. Judicious use of the volume and second gain stage controls in conjunction with a three-way switch that toggles between 5E3 and High Power Twin voicings, or a combination of both, can replicate a range of gnarly tweed tones. Keef *and* Neil Young in a box? You betcha.

Lumpy's Tone Shop Lemon Drop

PRICE $129 **CONTACT** Lumpy's Tone Shop lumpysspeedshop@msn.com **www.lumpystoneshop.com**

Sick of conventional overdrive tones and fancy something a little different? The Lemon Drop harks back to the hybrid 4 and 7 Series Vox amplifiers used by The Beatles during the *Revolver* sessions and a certain James Patrick Page on such gigantic Led Zep classics as *Whole Lotta Love* and *The Lemon Song*. The solid-state preamp design found in the aforementioned Voxes utilised a silicon transistor in the input stage, giving them a distinctive growl with a hint of fuzz around the edges. The Lemon Drop does a fine job of capturing this gritty drive, while its internal components and build quality are top drawer.

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Epiphone Wildkat Natural finish, P-90s, Bigbsy. Good condition, nice player. £200 ono. Collect only, London. Call Ray on 07982 843727 or mail rayahill@btinternet.com

Farida A-62CE electro-acoustic, Fishman electrics with Presys blend onboard preamp, Farida hardcase, 12 months old, mint condition. £450 ono. Tel. Graham 01619 738406. South Manchester

Sound City SC40C (Mk VI) Great British tone, two-channel reverb tank, fully working. Good cosmetic and operational condition. £250 ono. Collect only, London. Call Ray on 07982 843727 or mail rayahill@btinternet.com

Gibson J-200, Vintage Sunburst, AAA flamed sides and back. Montana-made 1997 factory fitted Fishman OHSC. Beautiful, sounds incredible, £2,150. 07788 283017, Glasgow

Resonator guitar, brass body, Style O, single cone, very loud, nice for blues slide playing, hard case, can send picture, £650. Tel: Pete 07957 174295

Fender 70s Classic 135 bass amp, plus 4x12" cab – tall version. Fair condition, £350. Call 01723 447960, Scarborough.

G&L Legacy Strat, USA, Sienna Burst, serial 12329, maple neck, certificate & tags, case, VGC, £650 ono. Collect or post. Phone 01298 74208 after 6pm, Derbyshire

Guild F20 acoustic, small-bodied with spruce top and mahogany sides and back, made in USA in 1991, VGC with case, £800. Tel: 01865 711827, Oxford area

Peavey Vegas 400 210W, 15" Black Widow, mint condition, light use, never been gigged, £450 ono. Tel: 01903 261931

Hughes & Kettner Puretone 25W combo, with cover, good condition, £650. Tel: 01543 899232; text: 07971 707995 or email: malcsmart@me.com, Staffordshire

Faith Eclipse Saturn, black, as new with hard case, £495. Tel: 07921 928530, Northants

Fender 1974/75 Mustang Bass in sunburst. Serial 589980 (F plate), owned from new, all original. Selling as part of my guitar and bass collection, as I don't use this now and it needs to go to a good home, £1,400. Tel: 07789 071549, Ferrybridge, W Yorkshire, buyer to collect

Gibson Les Paul Deluxe goldtop, 1972, one owner, tags, strap, lead, case, DiMarzio pickups and TP6 tailpiece fitted, but original pickups and tailpiece included, good condition for year. £3,000. Gibson ES-175D sunburst, 1979, one owner, tags, case, good condition, £3,000. Heritage Golden Eagle Sunburst, 1985, one owner, DeArmond floating pickup fitted, but original pickup included in price, £3,000. Tel: 07593 398272 or email roger_gill@btinternet.com

Gibson USA Les Paul Studio. Cherry, with EMG 81-85 humbuckers and Gibson gigbag, £475. Tel: 02920 408497 or email: lmsjones@sky.com

K.Yairi 60th Anniversary 12-string, beautiful guitar with sitka spruce top and maple sides and back, fitted with Vanden Mimesis soundhole pickup, now marketed by Fishman as the Rare Earth pickup. £335 ono. Email: geofftate264@gmail.com, Newcastle

Fender 1x12" Deluxe 22W valve combo, mint condition, £900. Mesa/Boogie Recto-Verb 25W 1x12" combo, mint condition, £1,000. Mesa/Boogie Nomad 45W 1x12" combo, mint condition, £600. Tel: 07935 607035, Northern Ireland

Three Copicat echoes, one in good working order, the other two need to be serviced, asking price for them is £175, would sell together or separately. Email: aonroi@gmail.com

Cornell Romany Pro 2x10 20W, all-valve amp, switchable from 20-10-5-2 watts, custom made, £1,200 or swap for Heritage or Gibson 335. Tel: 07973 187375

Left-handed DeArmond Starfire Special, Cherry Red, Bigsby, no case, £400. Tanglewood TW-55 electro-acoustic, gig bag, £350. Both mint. Tel: Simon 07887 952916, Cumbria

WEM Watkins Rapier 44, red guitar, great example of 60s imagery, £250 ono. Guitar case, 1960s, fair condition, maroon interior, £40 ono. Tel: 020 8803 5337, London

Admira classical Sombra model, solid spruce top, 12 months old, excellent condition, includes hardcase, £150 ono. Call Mathew on 07487 657522, Morecambe

Gibson 1957 Les Paul Junior, the real deal, original case and Hiscox, £6,500. Boss FA-1, amazing condition, boxed with instructions and period brochure, no belt clip, £300. Tel: 07816 404742 or email studuke@hotmail.com, Devon

Parker Nitefly, USA, black, DiMarzio humbucker, Parker gigbag, fantastic condition, £999. BC Rich Mockingbird, NJ Series, quilted antique natural, walnut body stringers, 24-fret ebony fingerboard, Ritter gigbag, mint, £499. Epiphone Prophecy GX custom SG, Black Cherry, coil-tapped Gibson Dirty Fingers, 24-fret ebony board, speedtaper neck, mint, boxed, £450. Fender Japan Telecaster, Candy Apple Red, rosewood fingerboard, 21 frets, £525. Tel: 01933 222766. Wellingborough, Northants.

Mesa/Boogie TA-30 combo, two fully independent channels, five style modes, awesome tones, as new, £1,000. Tel: Albert 01959 534190/07759 293536 or email albert.akint@gmail.com

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Digitech RP-6 or RP-7. Must be good condition and price, may collect. Tel: 07923 801153

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Mesa/Boogie Express 5:25, good condition, prefer London area. Tel: Mick 020 8530 1208

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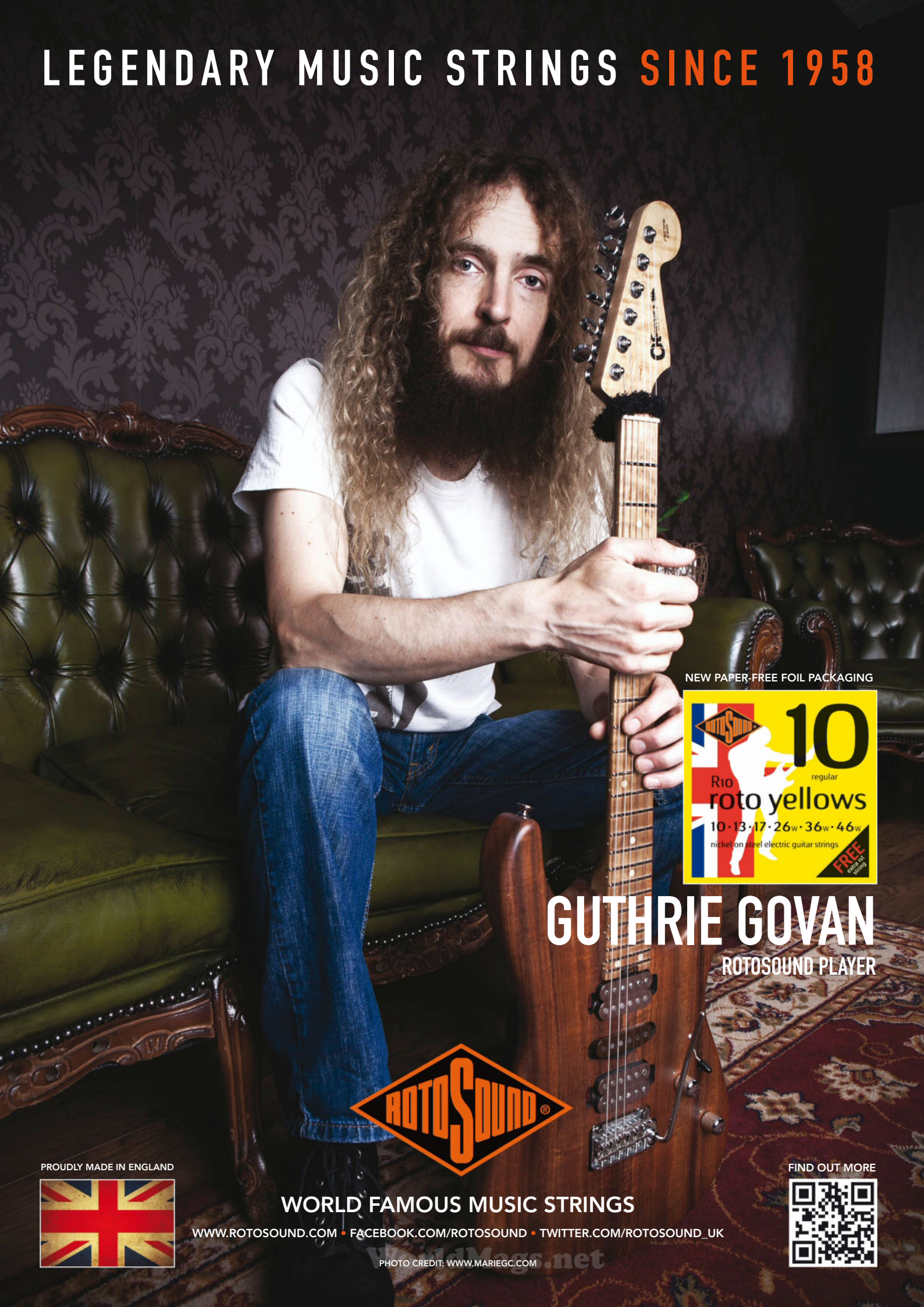

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All about... compression

In a new series, we focus on the complex areas of guitar technology, recording and playing. **ANDY PRICE** kicks off with compression, one of the most misunderstood of all effects

Is there a more thoroughly divisive (and perplexing) area in music-making than compression? Many a guitarist will have purchased a pedal, fastened it onto their 'board and, after a few knob tweaks, found that it somehow made their sound miraculously, indefinably 'better', and left it at that. But what's happening when your signal is compressed? Well, if used correctly, a compression pedal can completely revolutionise your guitar-playing setup and, most importantly, make you re-evaluate the way you approach your instrument.

What's going on?

Compression, in simple terms, affects your overall volume by reigning in the louder notes, chords and pretty much any sharp, shrill or loud sounds that you might generate when playing. It does this by applying a preset threshold on just how loud you can get with your guitar before the circuitry kicks in and reduces the volume. The rate and length of compression, and any additional volume gain you want to add to the signal after it has been compressed, are usually all modifiable on your pedal. It can also equalise the sound, so that the quieter and louder elements are the same volume.

Compression can also disguise some of the mishaps that befall players who are perhaps a little sloppy when moving between chords or notes by totally eliminating unexpected loud overspill from other strings and generally making everything sound extra-tight, even if your attack is variable. As any guitarist with a compression pedal will tell you, this can be incredibly useful in a live context. Especially if you're sharing amplification (as many gigging amateur guitarists are) or using a high-headroom amp without much natural compression – often referred to as 'sag' – of its own.

Certain rhythm-oriented genres, such as reggae and funk, rely on compression to maintain that slick and smooth pulse. The choppy and kinetic playing styles of Nile Rodgers, Al McKay and others of that ilk would sound very different without liberal use of the compressor to keep the sound at an equal level. The same can be said of folk and country players, who use it to solidify arpeggiated fingerpicking, often upping their output gain so the quieter moments are boosted.

Raising the volume

Although there is a vast range of different types of compression pedals, most will have the same controls and modifiers; these include threshold (or level), attack/release, ratio and output gain. Threshold controls how loud your signal needs to become before the compressor kicks in and reduces the volume. This is usually measured in decibels. Attack modifies the time delay between the signal hitting the threshold before being compressed, creating more 'impact', while release controls how long the sound is compressed before the signal is let go. These require careful manipulation to achieve the required balance for your sound, and there's no 'right' level – it's all part of the creative fun! Some pedal manufacturers don't enable the attack and release to be modified, however, as the way these controls are 'voiced' in that regard may be the sonic signature of their pedals.

Compression affects your overall volume by reigning in the louder notes, chords and sharp sounds

Ratio controls just how much the signal is compressed, and when set to a very high level it will not allow any signal that exceeds the threshold level to go past, which can result in the unpleasant side effect of a very flat sound if over-used. For example, a ratio of 4:1 simply means that any audio signal exceeding 4dB will be reduced to 1dB when it is output.

Output gain can boost your tone by adding extra gain to the signal after the compression has taken place. This can make every sound normalise at a much louder volume – if you want to have more dynamic variety in your playing before getting loud, proceed with caution!

Most users keep their compressors at the start of the signal chain, before distortion, chorus and all the rest. This way, the pedal can process the full, unmanipulated range of the signal from the guitar before it is altered by further effects, some of which (such as distortion) affect the signal so that it peaks artificially, or add their own inherent compression characteristics to the sounds.

The end result of all these settings is one that may appear somewhat counter-productive – to the audience, the effect should be

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transparent, so although you may have spent bloody ages getting exactly the right threshold, ratio and output gain settings, the punters out front shouldn't be aware of anything too dramatic happening to the sound, (eg, it sounding squashed). Their ears should perceive a dynamic, crisp and aurally pleasing guitar tone.

Comp-arisons

Compared to the recording studio, with eternally adjustable plugins working in conjunction with rackmounted analogue compressors full of dials and switches, a simple guitar compression pedal can seem somewhat flimsy, yet fundamentally they do exactly the same job. However, in a studio setting, compressors need to be completely scaleable so they can be used on a variety of different instruments and, of course, the ever dynamically-unreliable human voice.

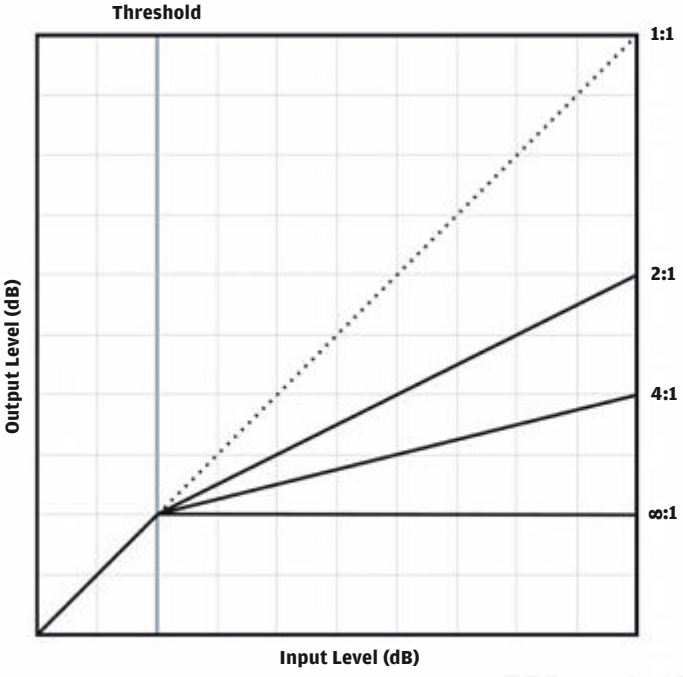
Guitar and bass pedal manufacturers have been crafting their wares for a long time, and there are many standouts – we've listed a few in our buyer's guide (right). Worth mentioning for historical significance is the MXR Dyna Comp, which has been on sale since the 1970s and is seen as something of a benchmark compression pedal, with its own unique sonic flavour. The Dyna Comp became a hot favourite of the Nashville country scene for its ability to thicken up the occasionally thin tones of single-coil guitars, and it's been used by such luminaries as Dave Gilmour, The Edge and Adrian Belew, too.

The Dyna Comp also bred a range of imitators, and 'improvers' – one brand that many compression pedal enthusiasts will go all gooey at the knees for is Ross, which – as legend has it – refined the MXR blueprint by adding stabilising capacitors that control the compression more effectively. The Ross unit also allowed you to achieve unparalleled sustain. They're incredibly rare these days, with many enthusiasts building their own cloned versions, but some originals can be found if you trawl the internet for long enough!

Cold compress

Use of compression is (like many aspects of the effects pedal world) hotly debated, with some claiming that it removes unique character from their well-honed rig and dulls their tone, and on occasion (depending on the quality of the pedal you're using) adds unwanted hiss by raising the noise floor.

While it's true that using a compressor in the extreme can flatten and de-energise certain instruments, in a live context when used correctly, it can cement your sound, equalising otherwise erratic dynamics and adding an unmistakable polish, both to your tone and the overall band mix.



BUYER'S GUIDE

If you are looking to add a compressor to your rig, there's no shortage of options, from the cheap and cheerful to pro-level units. Any one of this quartet would be a sound choice for your latest stompbox squeeze...

BOSS CS-3 £59

The CS-3 is the latest in the company's series of solid, affordable sustain/compression pedals. It's capable of normalising your loudness while also providing smooth sustain.

XOTIC SP COMPRESSOR £130

A quality tone shaper, the tiny SP is a great all-rounder with full-sounding vintage tones and impressive clarity. We're seeing more and more of these on pro boards, and with the small footprint and stellar performance that's not at all surprising.

MXR M102 DYNA COMP £70

One of the most popular compressors in history, the internals of these affordable stompers are frequently modded to make them even more flexible. New units are fairly inexpensive, while the vintage boxes can fetch a higher price.

KEELEY COMPRESSOR £199

If you can't find a vintage Ross pedal, or if you don't want to pay the often-terrifying prices they command, Robert Keeley's two-knob unit is a pro-level industry standard that some argue is even better.

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Clean Sweeping

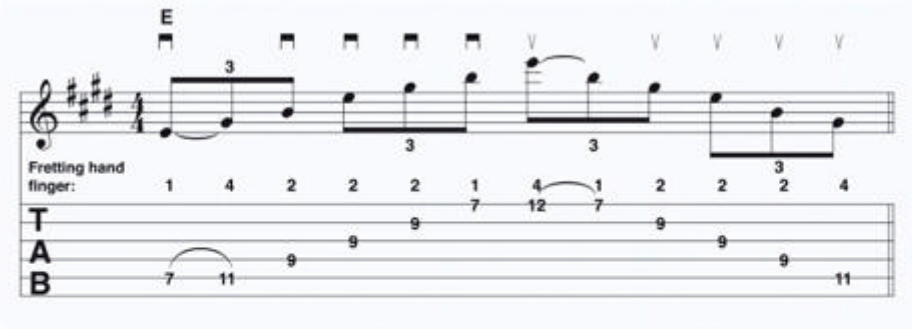
Combine the sweep-picking techniques you've picked up in this series so far as **DOUGLAS NOBLE** introduces three challenging two-octave arpeggios to get stuck into

This month, we draw together the sweep-picking techniques practised over the past few issues into three different two-octave arpeggios, all starting on the E on the fifth string at the seventh fret, and notated as triplets in 4/4 time.

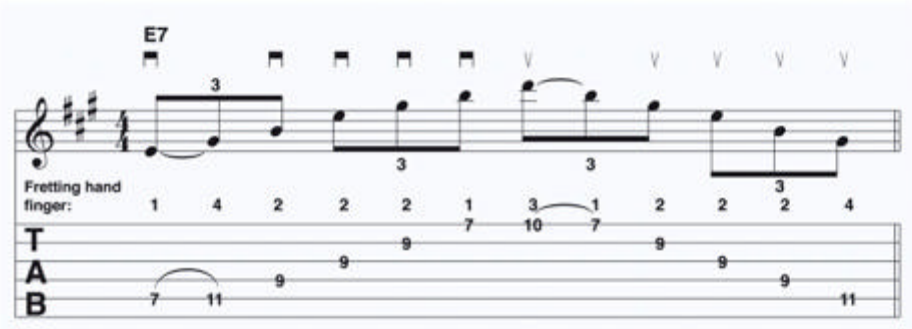
As ever, practise slowly and accurately, and try to make sure only one note sounds at a time. Once you've got the notes under your fingers, practise at around crotchet = 60. The advantage of sweep picking is that it enables arpeggios to be played very fast, so ultimately we're aiming for crotchet = 200, or minim = 100 (at high metronome settings, it can be easier to halve the speed of the click). The following exercises include suggested fretting-hand fingering below the music notation and above the tablature; every player's fretting hand is different, so feel free to change the fingering to suit your hand.

1 *E major arpeggio*

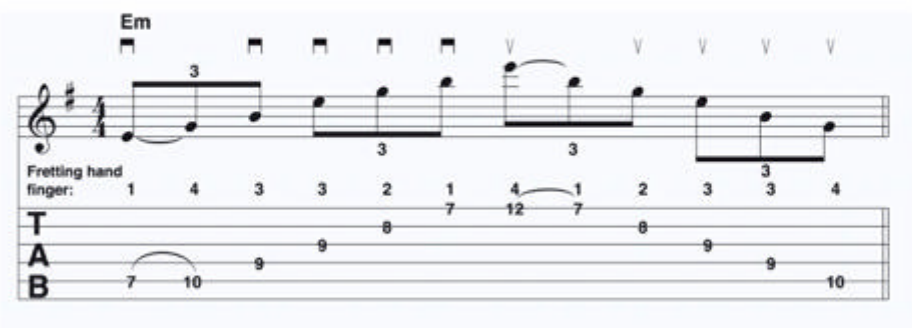
4:4 TIME

This E major arpeggio starts with a hammer-on on the fifth string and then involves 'rolling' the second finger across strings four, three and two (we examined this technique in last month's lesson). The top of the arpeggio involves a stretch with the fourth finger to E on the top string, 12th fret; leave the first finger on the seventh fret in preparation for the pull-off back to the same fret. The descending part of the arpeggio involves rolling the second finger back across the same strings.

2 *E7 arpeggio*

4:4 TIME

By changing the high E on the top string, 12th fret in Exercise 1 to D on the top string, 10th fret, we arrive at this E7 arpeggio. Just like Exercise 1, this one involves a hammer-on on the fifth string and then rolling the second finger across strings four, three and two; at the top of the arpeggio, though, leave finger one on the seventh fret whilst stretching to a D at the 10th fret with the third finger in preparation for the pull-off back to the seventh fret. As in Exercise 1, the descending part of this arpeggio involves rolling the second finger across strings two, three and four.

3 *E minor arpeggio*

4:4 TIME

As in the previous two exercises, this E minor arpeggio starts with a hammer-on on the fifth string, followed by rolling across just two strings with the third finger, leaving the second finger free to play the second string at the eighth fret. Once you've nailed these arpeggios, take each one in turn and practise moving up the fretboard one fret at a time as far as possible, then downwards until you end up where you started; how far you can go will depend on how nimble your fingers are. Then practise moving chromatically down the fretboard as far as possible and back up. This time, the limit will be the stretching ability of your fretting hand. Finally, play the E7 arpeggio from Exercise 2, followed by the A major one from Exercise 1, starting at the 12th fret. Next, play the E7 arpeggio, followed by an A minor arpeggio formed by playing Exercise 3 starting at the 12th fret.

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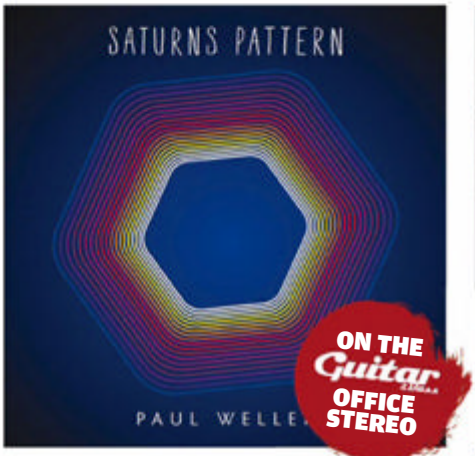
New music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven album releases and reissues



Paul Weller

SATURNS PATTERN

Weller's 12th solo outing finds the Modfather in thoughtful mood, while continuing to push into new territories. The heavy groove and wah soloing of opener *White Sky* – a collaboration with production duo Amorphous Androgynous – languid funk of *Pick It Up* and jaunty Beatles-y piano of *Going My Way* capture the former Jam and Style Council icon hopping gleefully through the genres. *Long Time*'s Stooges-like fuzz riffing and the slide playing on *In The Car* are guitar highlights, and there are flecks of electronic psychedelia throughout, yet *Saturns Pattern* is Weller's most familiar-sounding record in some time. On the serene, romantic *Phoenix,* Weller contentedly salutes the 'birds and bees', observing 'beauty everywhere' over a disco throb and bongos. The most refined composition on this nine-song set, however, is saved until last, in the form of the sublime tremolo-splashed *These City Streets*. **GW**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *David Bowie, Blur*

Mumford & Sons

WILDER MIND

They may be the London nu-folk scene's most successful export by some distance, but on album number three, Marcus Mumford and his bandmates have chosen to swap their banjos for electric guitars and their tweed waistcoats for black leather jackets. It's hardly Dylan going electric; the band built their sizeable following on the kind of anthemic choruses that always seemed destined for Glastonbury Festival's Pyramid Stage. That said, the propulsive, electro-infused indie rock of *Wilder Mind* borrows heavily from the likes of The War On Drugs, Coldplay and The National without forging a real identity of its own. The National's multi-instrumentalist Aaron Dessner was even enlisted to contribute keyboards to the album and shape its sound, but the end result feels rather like Mumford & Sons trying on someone else's outfit for size and carrying it off in not nearly as graceful a manner. **CV**

5/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Coldplay, Don Henley*

The Darkness

LAST OF OUR KIND

It's been a rocky road for The Darkness since their million-selling 2003 debut *Permission To Land*, with line-up changes, a spell in rehab for singer Justin Hawkins, a 2005 split and subsequent reunion. However, their fourth album is an upturn in form. All the hair metal cliches you'd expect are present, from bonkers Viking-saluting opener *Barbarian* to the anthemic, Scorpions-esque title track and *Roaring Waters*' wonderfully excessive soloing. The Darkness remain adept at writing a tune so catchy it'll burrow its way into your frontal lobe – *Sarah O'Sarah* and *Open Fire* are particularly infectious, while Hawkins' yelp reaches eye-watering highs on the Metallica-aping *Mighty Wings*. As the feedback of closing ballad *Conquerors* fades out, we're left to ponder whether the joke is worth retelling 12 years on. Ultimately, your take on that will depend on whether you found it funny in the first place. **GW**

6/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Def Leppard, Spinal Tap*

Jeff Beck

PERFORMING THIS WEEK... LIVE AT RONNIE SCOTT'S

First released in 2008, this Grammy-winning instrumental live album has passed into guitar folklore. It now has an extra disc with 12 more tracks of vocal action. Guests include Eric Clapton, Joss Stone and Imogen Heap. The whole thing comes from a five-night run in Soho, showcasing a unique talent at the height of his powers – the whammy action is at the limit of conceivable. **SB**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *John McLaughlin, Steve Vai*

Erja Lyytinen

LIVE IN LONDON

Captured at London's 100 Club, Finland's slide guitar sensation mixes original tunes with familiar gems culled from her hero Elmore James' catalogue. She's a veteran of nine studio albums, recorded from Helsinki to Memphis, but live, with her classically trained technique and mesmerising voice, Lyytinen is a bona fide force of nature – a phenomenon illustrated to full effect on the bonus DVD. **SB**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Bonnie Raitt, Sister Rosetta Tharpe*

Mick Abrahams

REVIVED

Ex-Jethro Tull guitar man Abrahams has been on a bad recent run health-wise, suffering a stroke and a heart attack. Yet it's clear from the bonus documentary he's still an upbeat character, and his friends rallied around to create this collection. Bill Wyman, Martin Barre, Paul Jones and Bernie Marsden all contribute, and 50 per cent of the proceeds will go to the charity Kids 'N' Cancer. **SB**

6/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Jethro Tull, Blodwyn Pig*

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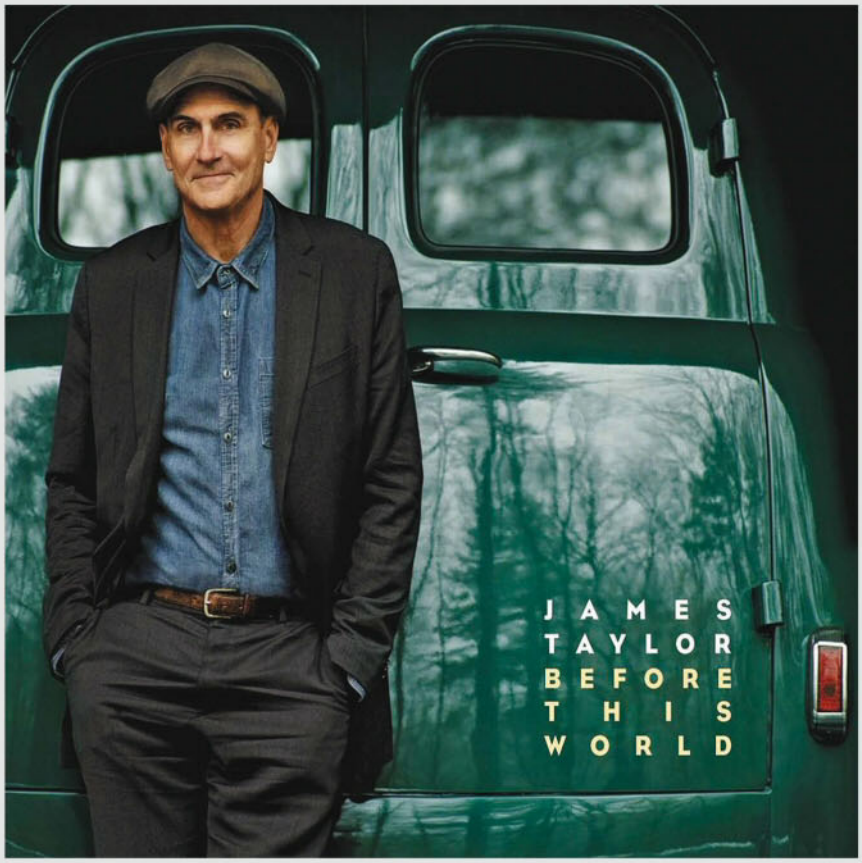


ALBUM OF THE MONTH

James Taylor

BEFORE THIS WORLD

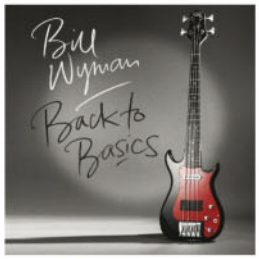
As composer of a long line of intelligent, revered, folk-infused hits from 1970 onwards, it's a surprise to hear that this gentle, thoughtful collection is Taylor's first of fresh self-penned material in 13 years. In order to rehabilitate the songwriting gene, the great man locked himself away in a waterfront apartment in Rhode Island – appropriately in Newport, home of the legendary folk festival – with just an acoustic guitar and a notebook. The scheme bore fruit and nine new songs resulted (the folkie standard *Wild Mountain Thyme* tops off the record as the final cut). Many regard the *Sweet Baby James* album of 1970 as Taylor's finest, and new tunes such as *Montana* and *Before This World* take you right back to those days when elegant, sun-kissed fingerpicking filled the airwaves. Michael Landau brings some choice guitar lines across the board, Sting lends a harmony on *Before This World*, while Taylor's wife Kim and son Henry contribute vocal backing on the baseball-themed *Angels Of Fenway*. There's perhaps no new *Fire And Rain* or *You've Got A Friend* here, but the mood is laid-back yet sincere, and even when Taylor tackles tricky subjects such as the war in Afghanistan there's a warmth and intimacy that draws you in close. **SB**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Carole King, Jackson Browne*

Bill Wyman

BACK TO BASICS



It's 33 years since the Rolling Stones man last issued a solo album. His most famous tune, *Je Suis Un Rock Star*, dates from that period and was offered to Ian Dury. It's easy to imagine the bard of Billericay being at home with Bill's new output, too; lyricals are loaded with dry wit and Dury-esque narratives, and although accompaniment is sparse, there's a playful charm at odds with Wyman's dour public persona. **SB**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Ian Dury, JJ Cale*

Richard Thompson

STILL

Thompson enlisted alt-country hero Jeff Tweedy of Wilco to produce this fine outing. His influence is subtle, but the solos are looser, with discordant abandon, while the darker side of Thompson's songwriting is given greater scope. That trademark chime is to the fore, except on finale *Guitar Heroes* – a seven-minute homage that sees Thompson burn through the techniques and tones of his six-string idols. **SB**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Fairport Convention, Bert Jansch*

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Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: vintage collecting on a budget, the wonderful world of amps, late bloomers and early starters...

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Collector's corner

This is just a quick word to thank Lars Mullen for the fine job he did featuring my modest guitar collection in the June issue, and to encourage other readers out there who might want to build a collection, but who hesitate on grounds of cost or availability. If the likes of Billy Gibbons and Joe Bonamassa have cornered the market in 1950s Les Pauls, good luck to them; you can build a varied and very playable collection from less famous, but equally interesting vintage American instruments, such as the Kays, Harmonies, Guilds and Kalamazoo Epiphones in my set. And it's never been easier, now we have internet auction sites, to find stuff and to get it sent from anywhere. As I write this, I'm awaiting a little 1978 Guild S-60D, which is on its way from Los Angeles. And a final point: Sid Bishop reckons more than half of guitar players only ever play at home. Well, if you want to exhibit your chops to people without the hassle of forming and promoting a band, investigate your local open-mic circuit. It welcomes players of all ages and experience, from beginners to old stagers like myself, it costs nothing and requires no regular commitment – and you'll make a bunch of like-minded friends. Happy collecting and happy playing!
Len Leslie, *Bristol*

G&B* Thanks Len. You make valid points. Recent years have seen a resurgence in interest in 'pawnshop' brands such as Harmony and Airline, thanks in no small part to their visibility in the hands of players such as Dan Auerbach and Jack White. The downside for us mere mortals is that the used prices of those 'bargain' American guitars have crept up by association – by all accounts Johnny Ramone began playing Mosrites in the 1970s because they were cheap, only to find that he drove the price up and could no longer afford them! The brands you mention still represent a more accessible entry point for a budding collector, though. And on the open-mic front, we couldn't agree more!

WRITTEN A LETTER OF THE MONTH?
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Rosetti

What a wonderful world

I'd like to tell you and the rest of the world how spot-on I think Sid Bishop was in his column in the April 2015 issue, The Wonderful World Of Amps. To me, I'd actually say that the amp is more important than the guitar. Sure, you can't make humbuckers sound like single coils, but I'm satisfied with a guitar that's roughly right. If I can have *the* amp that gives me *exactly* the right sound, it will probably make up for the shortcomings of the guitar.

Every time I join a new band, I feel that I don't have an amp that suits that particular outfit. I then go completely mad in the music stores, taking every tube amp they've got for a test drive in a search for the appropriate sound. I've tried Vox, Marshall, Fender, Orange, Mesa, Soldano and so on, but I usually end up with another 'blackface' Fender from the internet. I've owned others, but there's just something about those old Fenders, something that strokes the hairs in my ears the right way. It's funny, because I almost never feel I have the money to buy a really great guitar, but there often seems to be some cash hidden away when a nice amp appears!
Patrik Blomberg, Sweden

***G&B* Thank you for your letter, Patrik. We've always been of the mind that, all other factors being equal, an average guitar through a great amplifier will always beat the sound of a great guitar through an average amp. We'd be interested to hear what other readers think; let us know about your experiences!**

King of the Hill

I've been a fan of Slade since 1973, when I was, erm, much younger. I've seen them several times live, both the original and subsequent line-ups, and it has always been a great show. I was obviously delighted to see that you were featuring Dave Hill's iconic guitar and it was the first item I turned to last month.

When I first saw Dave's guitar, it was before I'd actually started learning to play, and all I knew it to be was 'some Gibson'. Later, when I'd started playing, I became ever more puzzled, as it wasn't like anything I'd ever seen in catalogues or magazines of the time. Does anyone remember *Beat Instrumental*?

So, the last time I saw the band, I decided I'd do the guitar-nerd type thing and hang around the back of the theatre until Dave came out. I didn't want an autograph; I just wanted to ask him about this guitar, to solve the mystery! Dave came out eventually, and I called to him. After an exhausting show – he really works the crowd – he looked over and smiled, and beckoned us over. He was tired, as I said, but he was such a lovely guy, and when he found out about my mission we spent a good 15 minutes talking enthusiastically about it and his new Super Yob guitar with the LEDs in the neck. I believe the original went on to Marco Pirroni.

So I got the whole tale of the marriage of parts by Sam Li, of the original Super Yob being a difficult guitar to play... and now you've given me even more nerdy info! It was a treasured experience and much better than one post-gig conversation with a folk-rock icon who shall remain nameless! Thank you, and very best wishes to you.
Paul Needs, via email

***G&B* Never meet your heroes, or so the saying goes. However, in this line of work, we've been lucky enough to encounter a string of legendary players, and we're pleased to report that almost every single one has been nothing short of affable. Some have even made us a cup of tea. Do any of you have similar tales of rubbing shoulders with greatness? Who really deserves the accolade of The Nicest Guy or Girl In Rock?**

As cool as Chris

Thanks for the Chris Spedding interview [May, 2015]. You can keep Clapton's virtuosity, Laine's songwriting, Jagger's riches. I just want to look as cool as Chris Spedding when I hit 70. So, I've got 13 years to grow back some of my hair then...
Kenn Palmer, via email

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Splinter groups

I'm sure a certain percentage of *G&B* readers are working musicians, with some of their income coming from music. As a past reviewer of gigs, festivals and award shows, there seems to me to be a trend, over the last few years, for bands to splinter and form another band or duo, and keep the original band going. It's all well and good for punters (more variety) and promoters (bums on seats), but unfortunately not the musicians and bands who don't work so much – that's another gig gone because the splinter band, duo or whatever, has taken it.

We all know the saying 'don't give up the day job', but in this case it's more like, 'don't take away the job from somebody else who needs it more than you do'. This may touch a few nerves, it may not. I would be interested to hear any other musicians' comments. It's not a rant, just an observation...

Chris Lowe, *via email*

G&B **Thanks for your letter, Chris. Perhaps the underlying message is there would be more gigs for everyone if there was a greater level of public support for grassroots live music. Without sufficient footfall to make band or open mic nights profitable, it's hard for venues to justify putting them on. Next time any of us are channel-surfing on the sofa, perhaps we should try heading to the pub around the corner and checking out some live music.**

Well Sid...

Great column by the Bishop last month. I've always been a fan, as at my age I can relate to most of the stuff he recalls. I left it late to start serious learning; my wife bought me a guitar for my 56th birthday. It was an electro-acoustic, but I'm now the proud owner of a £300 Korean-made electric guitar. It may not be the best model, but it does for me. I have only 'gigged' at open-mic nights, so I don't know if that qualifies as gigging – but no one ran out screaming. I agree you should never give up, and there's always new stuff to learn. I'll be 61 in a few weeks...

Bob Le Normand, *via email*

G&B **You are 100 per cent correct, Bob. You should never give up, and there's always something new for even the most experienced players to learn – it's a foolish musician who is arrogant enough to believe they know it all, and we've lost count of the number of virtuoso players who have confessed that there's still plenty they can't do with the instrument that they'd love to be able to. Open mic nights certainly do qualify as gigging, and your story is an example to us all. Good luck with it.**

Starting young

My five-year-old son is showing a real interest in learning to play the guitar after seeing me play. I'd love to buy him something small, that sounds and plays like a proper guitar. Having done a bit of digging online, I think the Epiphone Les Paul Express may fit the bill (and will go nicely with my Gibson Custom 1957 Les Paul Goldtop Reissue!), but I'm having trouble getting hold of one – they seem to fly off the shelves as soon as they land, then there's no delivery expected for months on end. Would you be able to recommend anything better or similar, or should I just hold fire until new stock hits the stores?

Julian Dace, *Bristol*

G&B **Firstly Julian, may we compliment you on your excellent taste; that Goldtop sounds very nice indeed. The good news for young fledgling guitarists these days is that there's a great deal more choice available when it comes to shorter-scale beginners' guitars than ever before. Many of our readers will remember learning to play in decades gone by on quite terrifying instruments with actions high enough to park a bus between the strings and the fretboard. If you can get hold of an Epiphone Les Paul Express, then your son will be the envy of his classmates! However, if you are still having trouble tracking one down by the time you read this, then we'd also recommend the Squier Mini Strat; you can get your hands on one for around £105, and its 3/4 size and short 22.75-inch scale is easy on small hands.**

HAVE YOUR SAY! Write to us by snail mail, *Guitar & Bass, Anthem Publishing, Suite 6 Piccadilly House, London Road, Bath BA1 6PL* or email **guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com.** Alternatively get in touch via social media on Facebook or Twitter.

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Carlos Amoedo

MARK TREMONTI

"My Spinal Tap moment..."

On the eve of the release of his second solo album, we probe Alter Bridge's Mark Tremonti for a few home truths

1 I couldn't live without my...
"My Mesa/Boogie Triple Rectifier has been a staple part of my rig since the early college years around '94, no matter what other amp joins the party."

2 In another life, I would be...
"I was in college studying finance, so I guess I'd be some sort of bean counter! But I'd have ventured off, looking for something else. I had some very unenjoyable jobs early on..."

3 The record that started it all...
"It was Metallica's *Master Of Puppets*. One night I was lying in bed listening to my brother playing all his albums. I was into what the other kids were into at school, I think it was the Beastie Boys, so I said, 'Let me borrow that record with that song about the sanatorium.' That was the moment I turned into a music fanatic."

4 The one that got away...
"My first serious guitar was a Les Paul Studio Lite. We did a show in Boston, thieves popped the locks off the van and all the gear got stolen, including the guitar I learnt on. It had a Kahler Pro vibrato, a locking bridge and everything. This guitar is where I got the neck dimensions and the feel from for my PRS signature model."

5 My Spinal Tap moment...
"We were playing [Austrian festival] Nova Rock with Alter Bridge in 2006. It was a big show, there were a lot of hot guitar players there, and I wanted to perform well. But five minutes before I went on stage, my tech told me that the amps had all blown as soon as we plugged into the local power. We had one backup amp, which really disliked – I'm not even going to say the name – and I had to get through a whole festival set in front of 40,000-plus people with no clean tone, just dirty, and no effects of any sort. It was tough, but people said that they dug the show, so we got through it."

6 The best advice I've ever been given...
"Stanley Jordan, on a DVD, talks about how he practises and how people would think he was silly for playing it slow and safe, as he does. He doesn't allow himself to make mistakes at home, so when he plays live he has that well-practised, clean style."

7 The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...
"Usually, I'll bend the B string up to the root note in the key of E, just to get my vibrato. My guitars and strings are all over the place, tuning-wise, so I have to get my bearings."

8 The most important thing on my rider...
"Water! I drink a lot of water out there, especially now I'm singing."

9 My most guilty musical pleasure...
"Birdy's first record – she's a young piano player of 18. I heard it at a pool party someone threw, it came out of the speakers, and I Shazam'd it. All covers, but well produced."

10 If I could learn to play one thing...
"I'd like to dive into some country-style, fingerstyle, Nashville-style playing, like Brent Mason. I have dabbled a little, but would like it to just flow..."

***Cauterize*, the new album from Tremonti, is released on 8 June.**

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